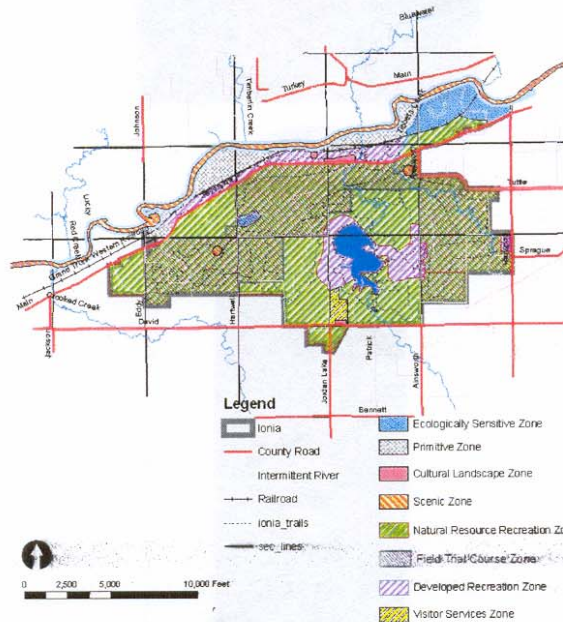


December, 2005

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Long-range management guidance focused on the specific natural resources, historic-cultural resources, recreation opportunities, and the education-interpretation opportunities of...

Ionia State Recreation Area



Prepared by:

Paul N. Curtis, Management Plan Administrator

PLAN APPROVALS:


Chief, Parks and Recreation Division

1/23/06
Date


Resource Management Deputy *by David Freed*

1-24-06
Date


Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

1/25/06
Date



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Long-range planning for Ionia State Recreation Area began in September of 2003 as one of four parks statewide where a new planning philosophy was implemented. “Management Planning”, a comprehensive, resource based process, is our adaptation of National Park Service planning methodology. In our iteration, which focuses on the four tenants of our Mission Statement, we thoroughly inventory the (1) natural resource values of the park, establish its (2) historic/cultural resources, identify the (3) recreational opportunities and explore the (4) educational and interpretation opportunities.

With this base of knowledge and with input of the “Planning Team” (made up of Department resource staff, stakeholders and public), we established an ‘identity’ for the park. The key significance of Ionia State Recreation Area (Ionia SRA) is:

First, Ionia SRA was established for purposes of developing a man-made lake and creating public recreational opportunities in what was defined in the early 1960’s as the “lakeless” area of the state. This initiative established the park and led to development of Sessions Lake in the late 1970’s. Sessions Lake is managed by Fisheries Division as a warm water fishery that experiences strong public use and appreciation. Active recreation for swimming, boating (no wake lake), and fishing, as well as passive recreation for picnicking and viewing are hallmark attributes of the lake.



Sessions Lake

Located on the Grand River in Ionia County, this 4,418 acre park provides inclusive recreational opportunities in an area lacking in public lands. From its inception, Ionia SRA has been planned, developed, and used for a wide range of recreational and educational interests.



Second, an important component of the recreational use of Ionia SRA lies in the extensive field trial activities found there. Under authority of the “Special Dog Training Areas Act, Act 82 of 1947, the Natural Resources Commission designated Ionia SRA as one of eight Field Trial Grounds locations in the state, and specifically designated three one-hour courses at Ionia SRA for establishment of a “Championship” Trial grounds.



Field trialers nationwide recognize Ionia SRA as a high quality venue for their sport.

In concert with this analysis of the park purpose and significance, the Planning Team established appropriate Management Zones and their extent of influence on the park. From a pallet of nine standard zones, we utilized seven for Ionia SRA, and developed a new one to address the field trial courses established by the NRC. The Management Zone Plan is found on the cover of this document, and a thorough review of all zones is found within. A condensed review of those applied at Ionia SRA is as follows:

- Primitive Zone – of the total 4,418 acres in the park, 543 acres of undeveloped land fall into this zone description. This represents the floodplain of the Grand River, bounded in general by four miles of river frontage and the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad line. It is not uncommon for spring floods to inundate this area with 5-10 feet of water every spring. The soils of the zone are highly organic silts, and easily subject to damage. Under the Primitive Zone designation, only foot traffic will be allowed...there will be no mountain bike or equestrian uses permitted. An exception to this may be considered for continuance (on a seasonal basis) of an existing boating access location already established. Described below, an Ecologically Sensitive Zone designation has been identified at the far east end of the Primitive Zone.
- Ecologically Sensitive Zone(s) – A total of 227 acres are designated in this zone, with portions in both the Primitive Zone and the Natural Resource Recreation Zone. In the Primitive Zone, 208 acres are identified for protection of the nesting habitat of two bald eagle nests and a heron rookery, all in the same vicinity. In the Field Trial Course Zone (Course #2), 19 acres are identified for protection of the habitat of the trumpeter swan. (Note...zone designation in all areas of the park will be defined by wherever the protected birds nest). In both locations, the zone will have a 'seasonal' designation, and the same period of closure of February 1 to July 15. This will impact early season goose and turkey hunting seasons.

All Field Trial Courses, having been managed as a grassland habitat for field trialing, are also favorable for protected and declining species of upland birds, including:

- Henslow's sparrow (State Threatened)
- Grasshopper sparrow (Special Concern)
- Bob-o-links (in decline)
- Eastern meadowlark (in decline)

The specific management guidance for these birds will be addressed in the "Field Trial Grounds Management Plan", but it should be expected that there will be some impact on the management regime for the field trial courses, and the running of events.

- Natural Resource Recreation Zone – The Natural Resource Recreation Zone is the largest zone in the park, with 3,113 acres comprising 70% of the total. It is utilized for general recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and trail use for hiking, cross-country skiing and equestrian use. Also within this zone is a special use for field trials. A non-standard zone has been established to address the specific management needs for this use. This zone is described below.
- “Field Trial Course Zone” – As a subset of the Natural Resources Recreation Zone, this 1,969 acre (non-standard) zone recognizes the NRC designation of Ionia SRA for ‘Championship’ field trial purposes. The Field Trial Course Zone is of considerable impact to the park, accounting for 45% of the total park acreage. This zone carries with it specific uses, natural resource management, and visitor use management.

Within Course #2 of the Zone is the potential for designation of an Ecologically Sensitive Zone in the wildlife flooding areas (noted above), and impacting the upland grasslands. This will occur only if the nesting trumpeter swans and/or the nesting of the protected upland birds takes place.

Activation of an Ecologically Sensitive Zone has the potential of impacting field trial activities. Retriever trials would not be allowed in the zone (for swans) if so applied. Pointer trial activities could be affected by nesting of the upland species. The “Field Trial Grounds Management Plan” will address this.

- Developed Recreation Zone(s) – There are three separate areas with this designation. The total acreage of the zone is 492 acres. 249 acres of that total incorporate all of the modern campgrounds, equestrian campground, day-use areas, boat launch and equestrian staging area. These are all well defined use areas centered on Sessions Lake, and developed for intensive recreational use.

The second is the mountain bike trail that is bounded by the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad line to the north and Riverside Drive to the south. As an old gravel pit/borrow area, the natural resource condition of this 229 acre zone is low, and opportunity for trail use and expansion high.

The third segment of Developed Recreation Zone is a subset of the Field Trial Course Zone. At the Ionia Field Trialers Headquarters, approximately 14.5 acres of land at the far east end of the park are developed for administration of field trials with a headquarters building, barn with stables, a large parking area and facilities for overnight stays by field trial participants. It is intensively used during the field trial ‘season’ of March through June and September through October.

- Scenic Zone – This zone recognizes the viewing opportunities of the four miles of natural frontage of the Grand River, Sessions Lake, and two specific view points within the park. There is no relevant acreage determination for this zone.
- Cultural Resource Zone – Several known historically significant locations exist within the park. The Sessions Schoolhouse along Riverside Drive is one such location, and this same area is also the general location of a Native American settlement. Nearby is the location of the County ‘Poor House’, an infirmary that once existed. Remaining is a cemetery that PRD maintains. Also along Riverside Drive is the “Posse House”, a successor to the Sessions Schoolhouse. Along David Highway, the park manager’s residence (the ‘Haynor House’) is of historic note, as are other scattered cultural resources that have also been identified within the park. This zone totals approximately 21 acres of the park.
- Visitor Services Zone – This zone takes in the headquarters and shop area of the park, and for purposes of potential future relocation or expansion, the zone has been pushed north of the current use area. It totals just over 43 acres of land.

Perhaps of most significance for this park is the management of the field trial courses in concert with the recreational uses of the general public. There is a dire need for improved education and communication. The first time park visitor has no clue that there is a ‘Field Trial’ use of the park that takes in nearly 45% of all park acreage. That visitor also has no awareness of the differences in allowable uses. Conversely, visiting field trialers look at their use of the park as an exclusive use, and they too are likely unaware that other public users may in fact use the designated courses for purposes other than field trials. Public comment in the planning process provided strong support of this need for improved education and communication.

There is a strong and historical equestrian trail interest at Ionia SRA, which in some areas is in conflict with the field trial course activity. A significant portion of the equestrian trail system lies within the field trial courses (Course #3 and a small portion of Course #2). It is acknowledged that there is a need for trail alignment modifications to eliminate or mitigate conflicts with field trials. Additionally, the need for re-alignment of trails is demonstrated by areas of resource damage and degradation that could be minimized.

Finally, the Planning Team recommends modification of the designated boundary of the Recreation Area to be David Highway as the south boundary, and Harwood Road as the east boundary. The current ownership of much of this land is in large parcels with few owners. Adoption of this recommendation would

strengthen our opportunities to expand recreational opportunities in the Recreation Area, and better define the boundary for management purposes.

INTRODUCTION

Planning Process Overview ([“Management Planning Process Outline”](#)) – The Management Planning Process develops a series of planning steps, each built upon the previous, that keep all planning and action decisions focused on (1) the mission of the Parks and Recreation Division, and (2) the specific Purpose and Significance of the park.

There are four phases of planning, implemented in the following order:

- **Phase 1** - General Management Plan (GMP) - Long-range (20 yr) goals
- **Phase 2** – Long-range Action Plan - long range (10 yr) goals to attain the GMP (requires review of Phase 1)
- **Phase 3** - 5-Year Action Plan – specific actions to implement (requires review of Phase 1 and Phase 2)
- **Phase 4** - Annual Action Plan and Progress Report – what will be done this year and what progress was made on last year’s plan

This is the **General Management Plan**, the first step in our planning process. In this phase of planning, we are defining what the park will look like in twenty years. What will be the condition of flora and fauna? How will we address historic and cultural resources? What recreational opportunities will be provided? What education and interpretation efforts will meet the visitor? What will guide the manager’s operational decisions? What will be the visitor’s overall experience?

A key tool of this plan is the identification of [“Management Zones”](#) which define specific characteristics of the land, addressing management for:

- Natural features
- Historic/cultural features
- Education/interpretation
- Recreational opportunities

These four elements represent the primary goals of the PRD Mission Statement, and provide guidance for both planning and management decisions. Within the parameters of this guidance, “Purpose” and “Significance” statements are developed for the park that establishes its unique identity and focus. No two parks are the same and this emphasis is directed at ensuring that the differences found from park to park are acknowledged, highlighted and celebrated.

Planning Objectives - The objective of this General Management Plan is to bring together Department staff, impacted and impacting stakeholders, and the public who use the park in a planning process that will define and clarify the unique “Purpose” and “Significance” of Ionia State Recreation Area. Collectively, we will reinforce those attributes in the planning and management decisions that impact the park through the implementation of the Management Zone Plan. Future action plans, whether focused on a development proposal, a resource improvement initiative, an interpretive program, or day-to-day management of the park will be guided by this General Management Plan.

PLANNING TEAM

Accomplishment of our planning objectives was and is dependent upon the valuable input provided by all members of the 'Planning Team'. Following are the names of those critical participants in this planning process:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>
Paul N. Curtis, Chair	MDNR-PRD, Management Plan Administrator
Ted Kessler	MDNR-PRD, Park Manager
Susan Lothrop	MDNR-PRD, Rose Lake District Supervisor
Joe Strach	MDNR-PRD, Rose Lake District Planner
Harold Herta	MDNR-PRD, Resource Management Section
Dan Lord	MDNR-PRD, Statewide Development Planner
Ray Fahlsing	MDNR-PRD, Stewardship Program Manager
Glenn Palmgren	MDNR-PRD, Stewardship Ecologist
Rob Strittmatter	MDNR-PRD, Park Ranger
Richard Hausler	MDNR-FMFM, Environmental Forestry Specialist
Brad Dohm	MDNR-LED, Conservation Officer
John Niewoonder	MDNR-WD, Wildlife Biologist
Donna Jones	MDNR-WD, Wildlife Tech
Mark Sargent	MDNR-WD, Wildlife Biologist
Lori Sargent	MDNR-WD, Resource Analyst
Scott Whitcomb	MDNR-WD, Public Lands Specialist
David Dominic	MDNR-WD, South Central Management Unit Supervisor
Amy Harrington	MDNR-FD, Fisheries Biologist
Douglas Finley	MDNR-EO, Education and Outreach Manager
Jack Hires	Field Trialer, Ionia Field Trial Grounds Committee
Charles Landstaff	Field Trialer, Chair, MUCC Field Trial Grounds Committee
Wayne Warners	Field Trialer, Trial Coordinator, MUCC Field Trial Grounds Committee
Bob Keilholtz	Equestrian, President, Ionia Horse Trails Association
Debbie Haskins	Equestrian
Clare Haskins	Equestrian
Joe Mast	Equestrian
Bill Wyszomierski	Equestrian
Duane Dykstra	Equestrian

CORE VALUES

Guidance for the General Management Plan stems from the Mission Statements of the Department and the Division, and the Purpose and Significance Statements that have evolved through the planning process. The core values found in these statements must be reflected in this long-range General Management Plan for Ionia State Recreation Area and subsequently reflected in any shorter range action plans:

DNR Mission Statement - *"The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the State's natural resources for current and future generations."*

PRD Mission Statement - *"Acquire, protect, and preserve the natural, historic, and cultural features of Michigan's unique resources and provide public recreation and educational opportunities."*

The core values derived from these statements are that PRD will acquire, preserve and protect; (1) natural resources, (2) cultural resources, (3) provide public recreation, and (4) provide educational opportunities.

Park Purpose - Park purpose statements are based on park legislation, legislative history, special designations and DNR policies. These statements reaffirm the reasons for which Ionia State Recreation Area was identified as part of the State Park system.

- Ionia SRA was established for purposes of developing a manmade lake and creating public recreational opportunities in what was defined in the early 1960's as the "lakeless" area of the state. This initiative established the park and led to development of Sessions Lake in the late 1970's.
- To preserve and protect the park's unique natural resources for current and future generations.
- To preserve and protect the park's historic/cultural resources.
- To provide opportunities for recreational uses and experiences in an area lacking in same, that are compatible with the park's resource(s) base.
- To provide educational and interpretive opportunities for the public that reflect the mission of the DNR and the unique qualities of Ionia State Recreation Area.

Park Significance - Park significance statements capture the essence of the park's importance to carry out the core values of our PRD Mission. They recognize the natural and cultural heritage values of the park and the recreational and educational opportunities afforded. These statements describe the distinctiveness of Ionia State Recreation Area. Understanding these distinctions help managers make decisions that preserve those special resources and values necessary to accomplish the park's purposes.

- Ionia SRA, located on the Grand River in Ionia County, provides inclusive recreational opportunities in an area lacking in public lands. From its inception, Ionia SRA has been planned, developed and used for a wide range of recreational and educational interests.
- Ionia SRA, located in what was described as a “lakeless” region of the state, was identified in 1965 as one of the locations for development of a manmade lake to provide both water-based and general recreational opportunities to the growing population of southern Michigan.
- Under authority of the “Special Dog Training Areas Act, Act 82 of 1947, the Natural Resources Commission designated Ionia SRA as one of eight Field Trial Grounds locations in the state, and specifically designated three one-hour courses at Ionia SRA for establishment of a “Championship” Trial grounds.
- Ionia SRA offers a variety of water features including Tibbets Creek, a designated trout stream, Sessions Creek and tributaries, frontage on approximately four miles of the Grand River, Sessions Lake (a 140 acre lake managed by Fisheries Division), and wildlife floodings created for waterfowl habitat.
- Ionia SRA provides Grand River floodplain habitat to two bald eagle nests and a heron rookery. The protected Trumpeter Swan has nested in and occupied the waterfowl floodings within the park.
- Occurrences of ‘Threatened’ (T), ‘Special Concern’ (SC), and ‘Endangered’ (E) species occur in the park for:
 - Henslow’s Sparrow (T)
 - Blanding's Turtle (SC)
 - Elktoe Mussel (SC)
 - Purple wartyback (SC)
 - Round pigtoe mussel (SC)
 - Snuffbox mussel (E)

- Ionia SRA offers excellent opportunities for research, education and interpretation in the areas of:
 - Significance and importance of field trialing
 - Cultural aspects of Native American and early settlement life.
 - Natural Sciences

Legal Mandates - For all park General Management Plans, all legal mandates will be identified and will serve to further guide the development of the General Management Plan and subsequent Action Plans. For our planning purposes, the term “Legal Mandates” refers to not only state law, but also the administrative tools of “Policy” and “Directive” of the Natural Resource Commission, the Department, and Parks and Recreation Division. Specific to Ionia SRA, the following legal mandates have been identified:

- PA 451 OF 1994, PART 741 - STATE PARK SYSTEM - NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT - This act is the recodification of law that established the Michigan State Park System and defined the powers and duties of same. Notable in this law is Section 324.74102 which identifies the duties of the department and reinforces those core values cited above.

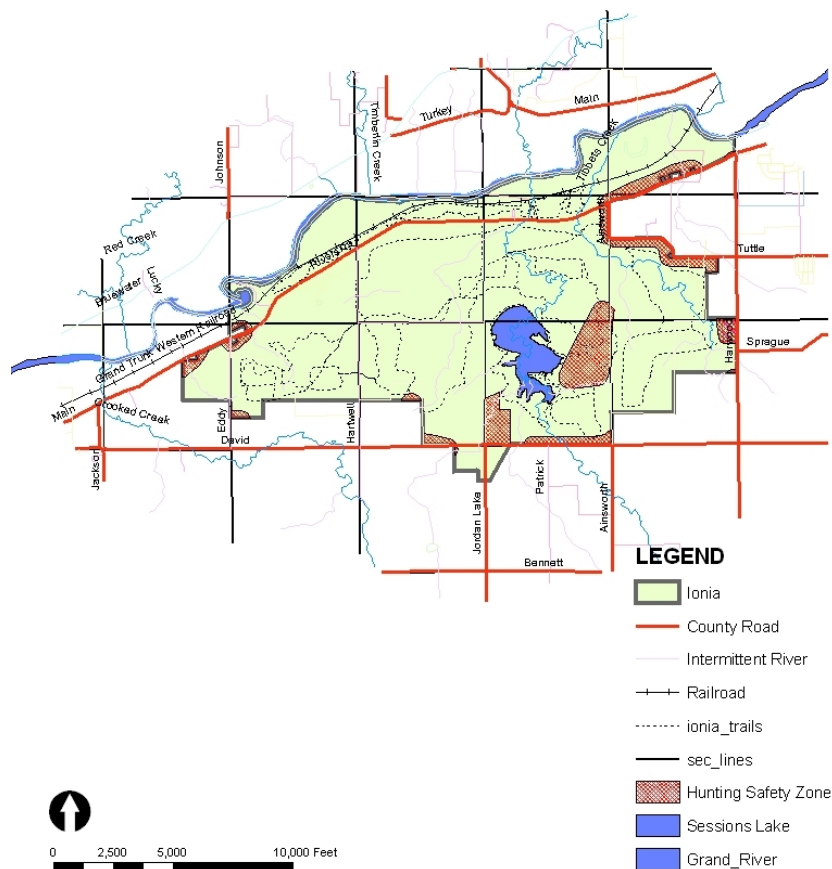
This section reads:

- (1) “The legislature finds:
 - (a) Michigan State Parks preserve and protect Michigan’s significant natural and historic resources.
 - (b) Michigan State Parks are appropriate and uniquely suited to provide opportunities to learn about protection and management of Michigan’s natural resources.
 - (c) Michigan State Parks are an important component of Michigan’s tourism industry and vital to local economies.
- (2) The department shall create, maintain, operate, promote, and make available for public use and enjoyment a system of state parks to preserve and protect Michigan’s significant natural resources and areas of natural beauty or historic significance, to provide open space for public recreation, and to provide an opportunity to understand Michigan’s natural resources and need to protect and manage those resources.”
- CONSERVATION COMMISSION DEDICATION OF IONIA STATE RECREATION AREA – At the May 14, 1965 meeting of the Department of Conservation, Conservation Commission, the proposal to develop the

“State Lake – State Park” at Ionia was recommended and approved by the Commission. This approval provided the authority to acquire lands, develop the lake (Session Lake), and establish recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing and “general park purposes”. This action established “Ionia State Recreation Area.”

- PA 451 OF 1994, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT) – 324.41901 Regulation and prohibitions in certain areas; powers of department; area closures; hearings, investigations, studies, and statement of facts; regulations. – This part of PA 451 establishes the powers of the Department to establish safety zones for hunting. In accordance with the Administrative Rules established by Wildlife Division for hunting safety, a 450’ “Safety Zone” is established around all occupied dwellings (which includes campgrounds). Under the State Land Rules, the Department also has the authority to expand the application of this 450’ “Safety Zone” to encompass “Day-Use Areas” such as beaches, picnic areas, boat launches, and parking areas, should the need arise. This is determined on a case-by-case basis. At Ionia SRA, the Hunting Safety Zones are represented below:

Hunting Safety Zones



Additionally, **(from Wildlife Conservation Orders Re. goose hunting) State recreation areas open, exceptions; September 1 to September 15 open season, exceptions.**

(7) Those state recreation areas described in chapter VII as closed to the taking of animals shall be closed during the early September hunting season for Canada geese. All other state recreation areas not within the Saginaw bay unit shall have an open season from September 1 to September 15, except for those portions of the following areas which shall be closed and shall be posted in such a manner and at such locations as will provide reasonable notice of the closure to the public:

(h) Ionia recreation area shall be closed to the taking of animals from September 1 to Labor day within 450 feet of any campsite, picnic areas, beach, parking area, or boat launch. In addition, no animals shall be taken from the day after Labor day to September 15 after 8:00 a.m. within 450 feet of any campsite, picnic area, beach, parking area, or boat launch.

- **NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION (NRC) DEDICATED FIELD TRIAL COURSE** – Under authority of the “Special Dog Training Areas Act, Act 82 of 1947, the Natural Resources Commission designated Ionia RA as one of eight Field Trial Grounds locations in the state, and specifically designated (with a legal description) three one-hour courses at Ionia RA for establishment of a “Championship” Trial grounds.

Department Of Natural Resources – Field Dog Trial Regulations - Chapter XV -- Field Dog Trials - 15.2 Field dog trial, defined; designated field dog trial areas established.

(1) For the purposes of this chapter, "field dog trial" means a trial or meet, advertised as such and open to entry by persons whose dogs qualify, in which not less than 4 participants, with dogs, under control, are permitted to dog train in competition or contest. This definition does not apply to an individual cast within a field dog trial. There may be fewer than 4 participants with dogs in an individual cast. Dogs in a field dog trial are awarded points, trophies, or other actual honors for their performance and demonstration of hunting skills. A person or a group of persons dog training their dogs in competition but not under permit by the department are not participating in a field dog trial.

(2) Designated field dog trial areas are established on state-owned lands within the following described areas:

(d) Section 2; the NW 1/4 of section 4; that portion of section 5 lying south of Riverside drive, T6N R7W; the SE 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of section 32; that portion of section 33 lying south of Riverside drive; that portion of the N 1/2 of section 34 lying south of Riverside

drive; the NW 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of section 34; and section 35, T7N R7W, Ionia county, within the Ionia recreation area.

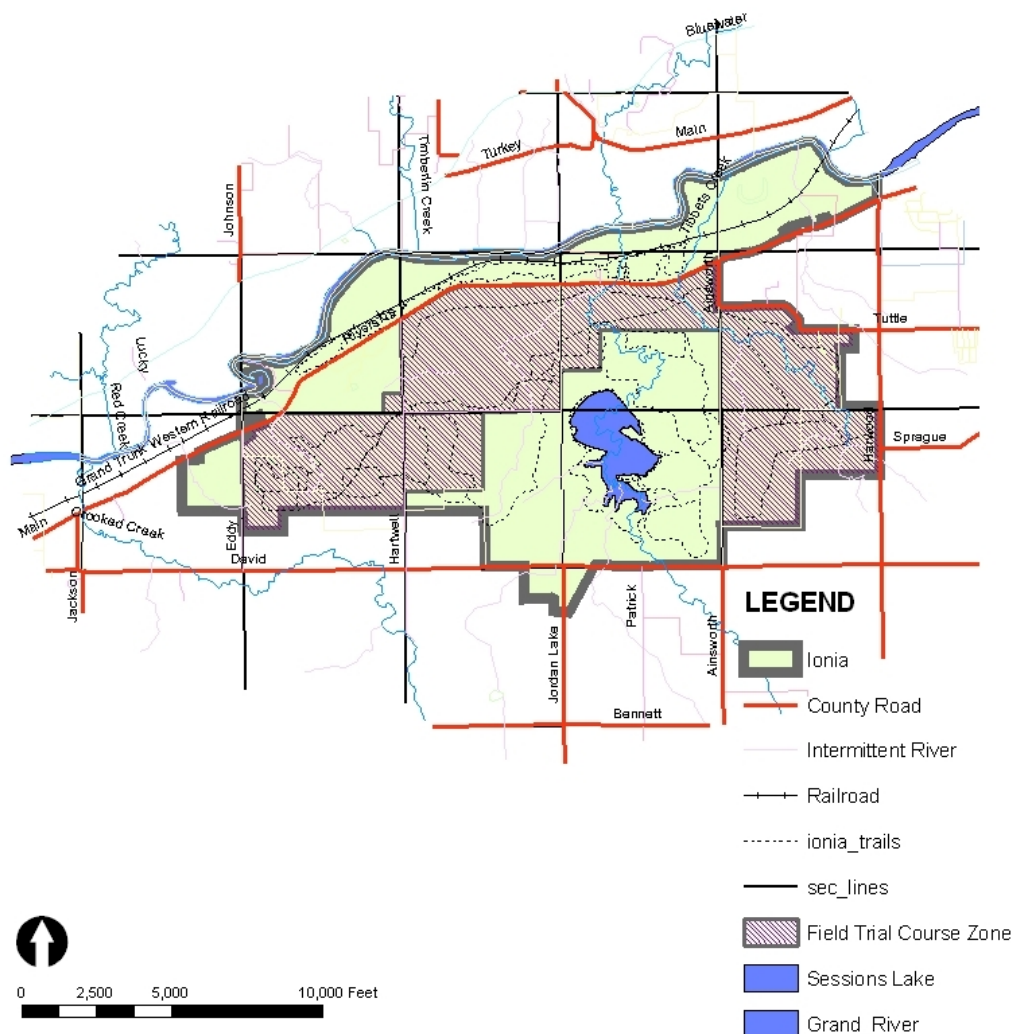
15.4 Field dog trial, unlawful acts.

Sec. 15.4. (1) It shall be unlawful to conduct a field dog trial between April 16 and July 14 without maintaining a list of all trial participants at trial headquarters. The list shall be kept throughout the duration of the trial and shall be available for inspection at any time by any peace officer.

(2) It shall be unlawful for a person to possess a firearm other than a shotgun, pistol, or revolver or ammunition other than blank cartridges while engaged in field dog trials, unless otherwise specifically authorized in writing by the director.

History: Am. 2, 1990, Eff. Feb. 19, 1990.

Designated Field Trial Course



- DEPARTMENT POLICY ON FIELD TRIALS – With the designation of the eight DNR locations for field trials (per direction of the NRC), the Department established guiding policy for the land administering agencies for operation of field trials on state lands. This impacts Parks and Recreation Division and Wildlife Division.
- “IONIA RECREATION AREA FIELD TRIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN – 1979” – Prepared by Wildlife Division, and approved by both Wildlife Division and Parks Division Chiefs, this management plan has served to guide both management and operation of field trials at Ionia SRA for the past 26 years. Stewardship is drafting a new “Field Trial Grounds Management Plan” with input from both Wildlife Division and the field trialers. When completed, this new plan will supercede the 1979 document.
- [LEASE BETWEEN STATE OF MICHIGAN AND IONIA FIELD TRIAL GROUNDS ASSOCIATION \(IFTGA\)](#) – On 2/25/2005 a lease was executed that provides for IFTGA operation and maintenance of the Field Trialers Headquarters (approximately 14.5 acres) and the Field Trial Parking Area for Course #2 (approximately 1.5 acres). In addition to grounds and building maintenance, the IFTGA is also responsible for providing an annual work plan for maintenance of the field trial courses in compliance with the new “Field Trial Grounds Management Plan” now being drafted.
- SESSIONS LAKE DAM (DEQ MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS) – PRD must comply with DEQ Dam Maintenance Requirements that result from their routine inspections of the dam. Additionally, routine maintenance recommendations (as specified by DEQ) shall be complied with. Typically this requires on an annual basis; removal of woody vegetation from the earthen dam structure, clean-out of the dam toe drains, inspection and clean-up of the dam overflow course, and annual ‘exercising’ of the dam water control valve.



- AGREEMENT WITH IONIA COUNTY FOR PRD MAINTENANCE OF THEIR CEMETARY – As part of the gift of 320 acres of land, PRD agreed to maintain a cemetery associated with the land gift.



- IONIA COUNTY FOR USE OF THE “POSSE HOUSE” BY THE COUNTY SHERIFF’S POSSE - As part of the transfer of ownership of the old schoolhouse on the north side of Riverside Drive from Ionia County to PRD, the deed required that PRD allow use of the building by the County Sheriff’s Posse. It is used principally for target practice purposes. (NOTE...although the deed language states that the site will be used by the Sheriff’s Posse, in fact it is used by other local enforcement agencies and the Corrections Officers from the Ionia prison(s))



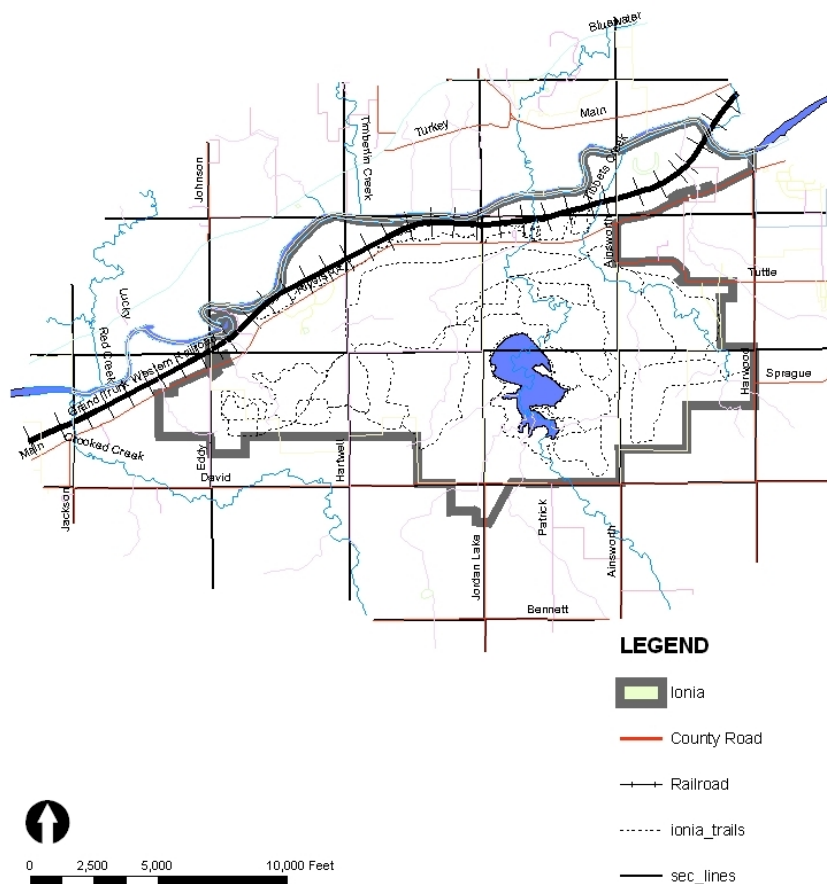
- TIBBETS CREEK IS A DESIGNATED TROUT STREAM – There are specific regulations regarding DEQ discharge permits. These control the temperature and quality of water discharges into streams. In concert with the intent of these legal requirements are ‘Best Management Practices’ that augment the effort to address water quality. Included in the Appendix is the document titled [“Evaluating Riparian Management Zones on State Lands”](#) and [“Water Quality Management Practices on Forest Land”](#). The Best Management Practices found in these reports will serve as guidance for PRD management decisions with regards to Tibbets Creek.
- MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH WEST MICHIGAN WETLANDS FOUNDATION (now disbanded) FOR THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE WILDLIFE FLOODINGS – These floodings were created in 1988 for purposes of improving habitat for waterfowl, and providing waterfowl hunting opportunities in the park. Maintenance

activities focus primarily on water level control structures. We have been assisted in this endeavor by beaver.



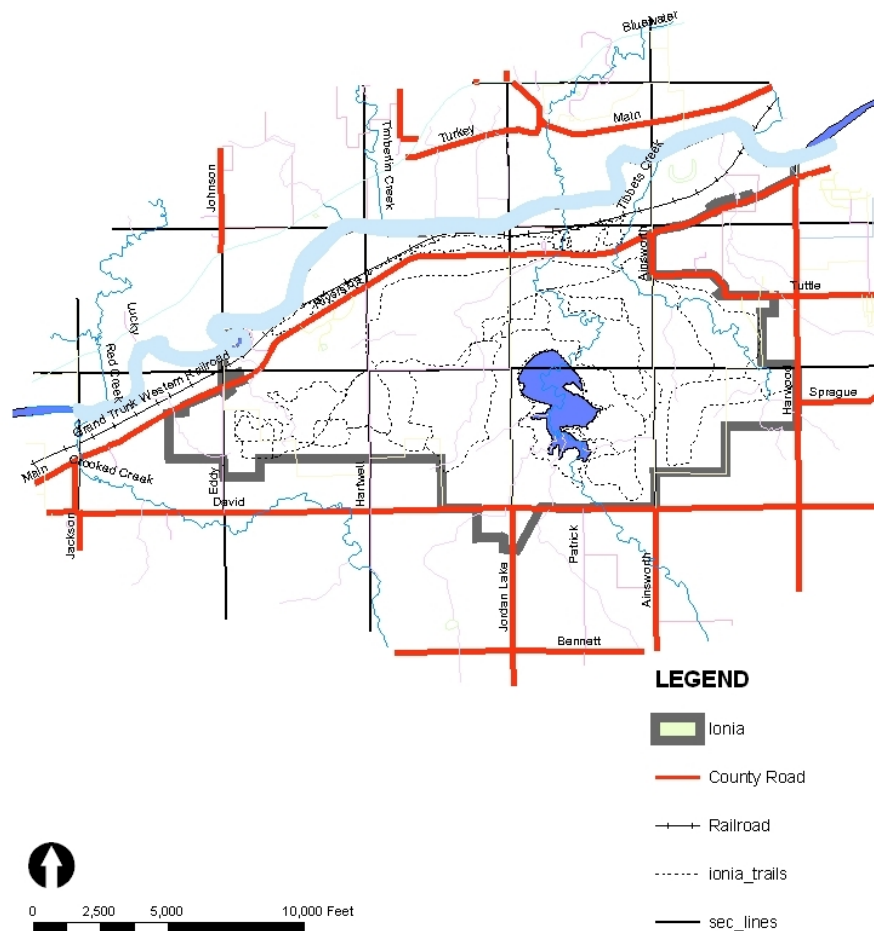
- R.O.W. FOR GRAND RAPIDS & EASTERN RAILROAD – The Right-of-Way for this railroad line is 100' wide (50' from center line). Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad has the authority to require permits for any impacts to their ROW (ie. crossings or new drives). Note...as of this writing, this railroad line has shown no sign of activity, and local planning agencies are exploring the conversion of this line to a rail-trail use.

Ionia State Recreation Area
**GRAND RAPIDS & EASTERN
RAILROAD R.O.W. – 100'**

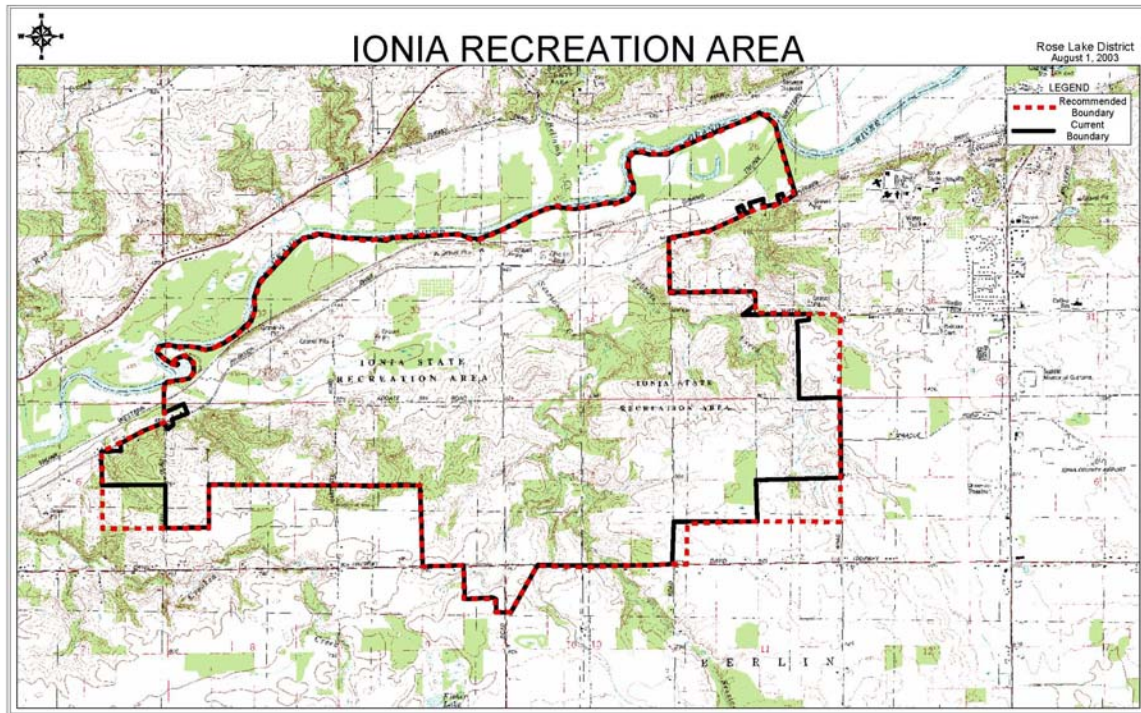


- **R.O.W FOR COUNTY ROADS** – The Right-of-Way for county roads is 66' wide (33' from center line). The county roads impacting Ionia SRA include; David Highway, Riverside Drive, Harwood Road, Ainsworth Road, Tuttle Road, Jordan Lake Road and Eddy Road. The Ionia County Road Commission has the authority to require permits for any impacts to their ROW (ie. crossings or new drives).

Ionia State Recreation Area
IONIA COUNTY ROAD(S) R.O.W. – 66'



- The Natural Resource Commission has approved a recommended boundary change for the park that includes additional land to the west and east ends of the park.



The Planning Team reviewed this new boundary designation and makes the following recommendation:

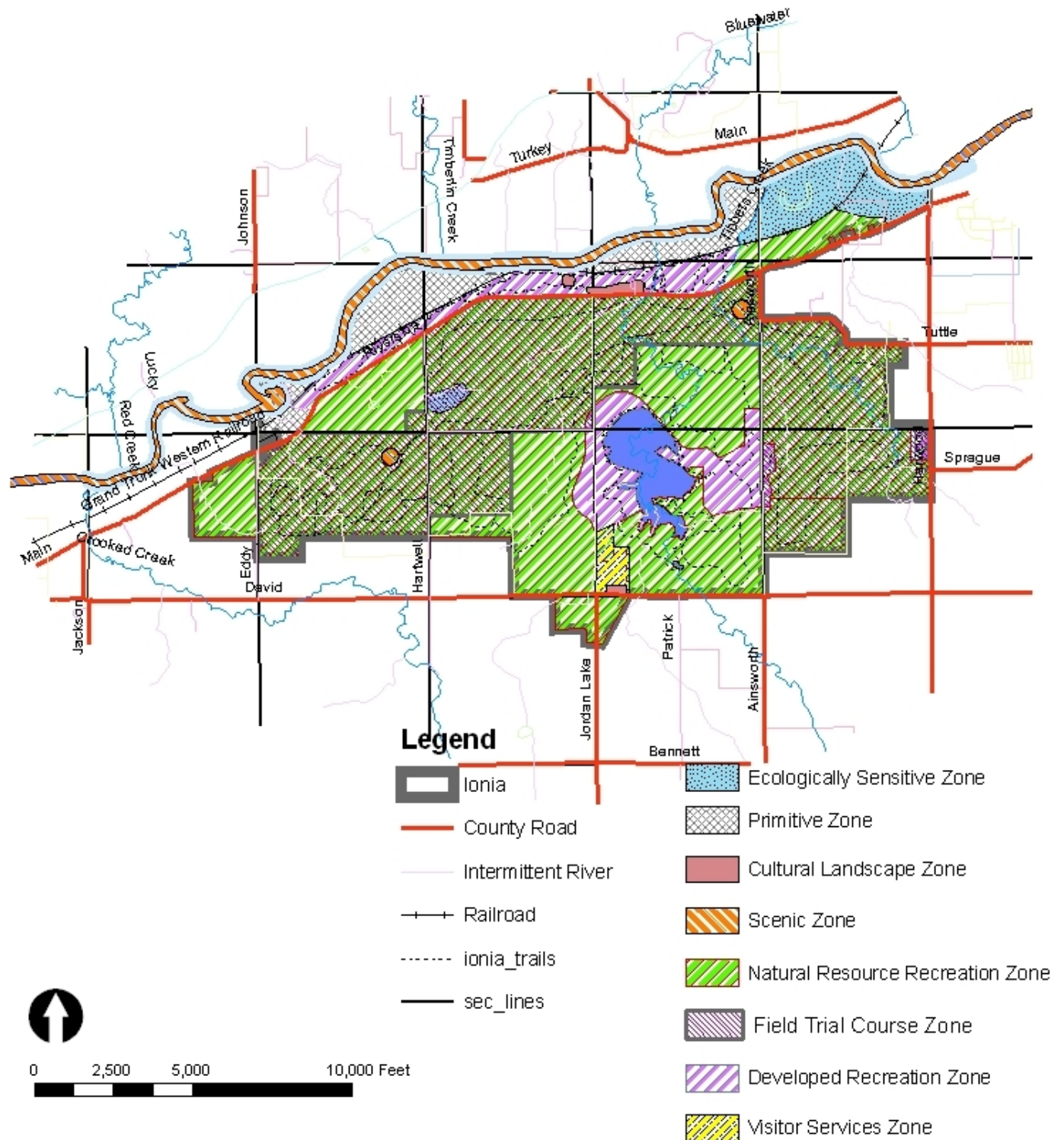
The south boundary of the Recreation Area should be David Highway and the east boundary as Harwood Road. The David Highway boundary would go behind the more intensively developed residential area at the west end of the Recreation Area.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

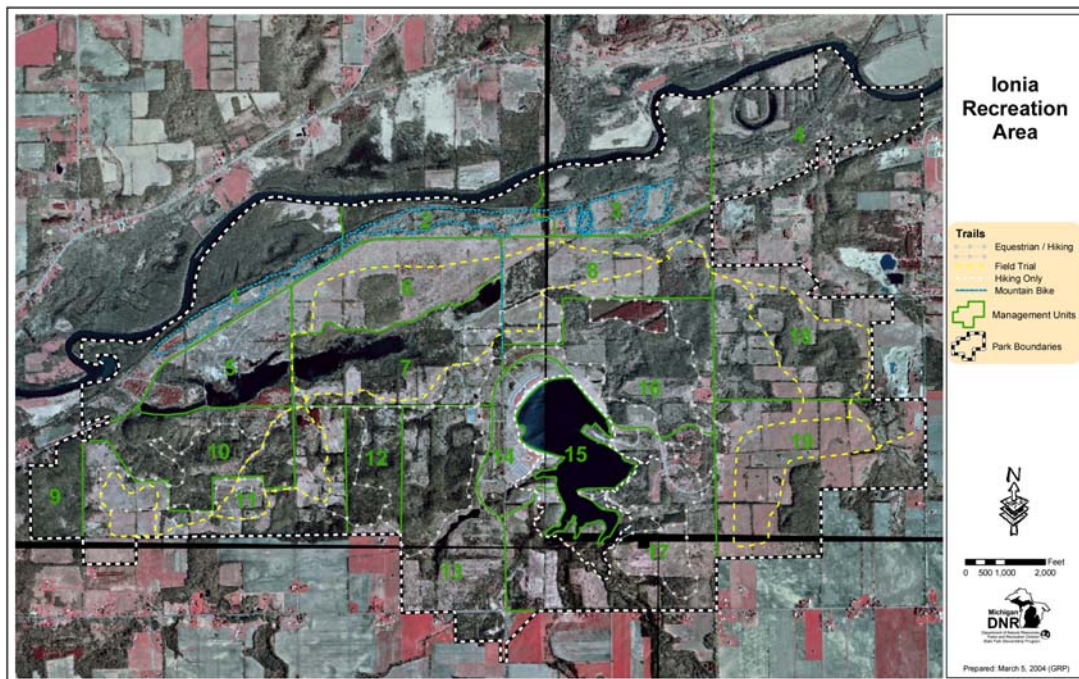
With guidance of the Ionia SRA Planning Team (inclusive Department participation) and input from our stakeholders and the public, the park [“Purpose and Significance”](#) statements were drafted and adopted. This established an identity for the park that highlights that; Ionia SRA was established for the purpose of providing a wide range of water based (with the manmade Sessions Lake) and general outdoor recreation opportunities in a “lakeless” part of the state. Ionia SRA provides a diversity and quality of water resource opportunities that is emphasized by (unique to southern Michigan) the designation of trout quality waters (Tibbets Creek), the quality of the natural landscape found in this park supports the federally and state protected bald eagle, Trumpeter Swan, and heron nesting habitat, and, of greatest resource and user impact, Ionia SRA is a designated (by the NRC) “Championship Field Trial Course”.

Based on this ‘identity’ for the park, a “Management Zone Plan” was subsequently drafted and adopted with stakeholder and public support. The [Management Zone Definitions](#) apply to each zone used, with special considerations highlighted in the descriptive narratives of management guidance for each zone of the park.

Ionia State Recreation Area GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN



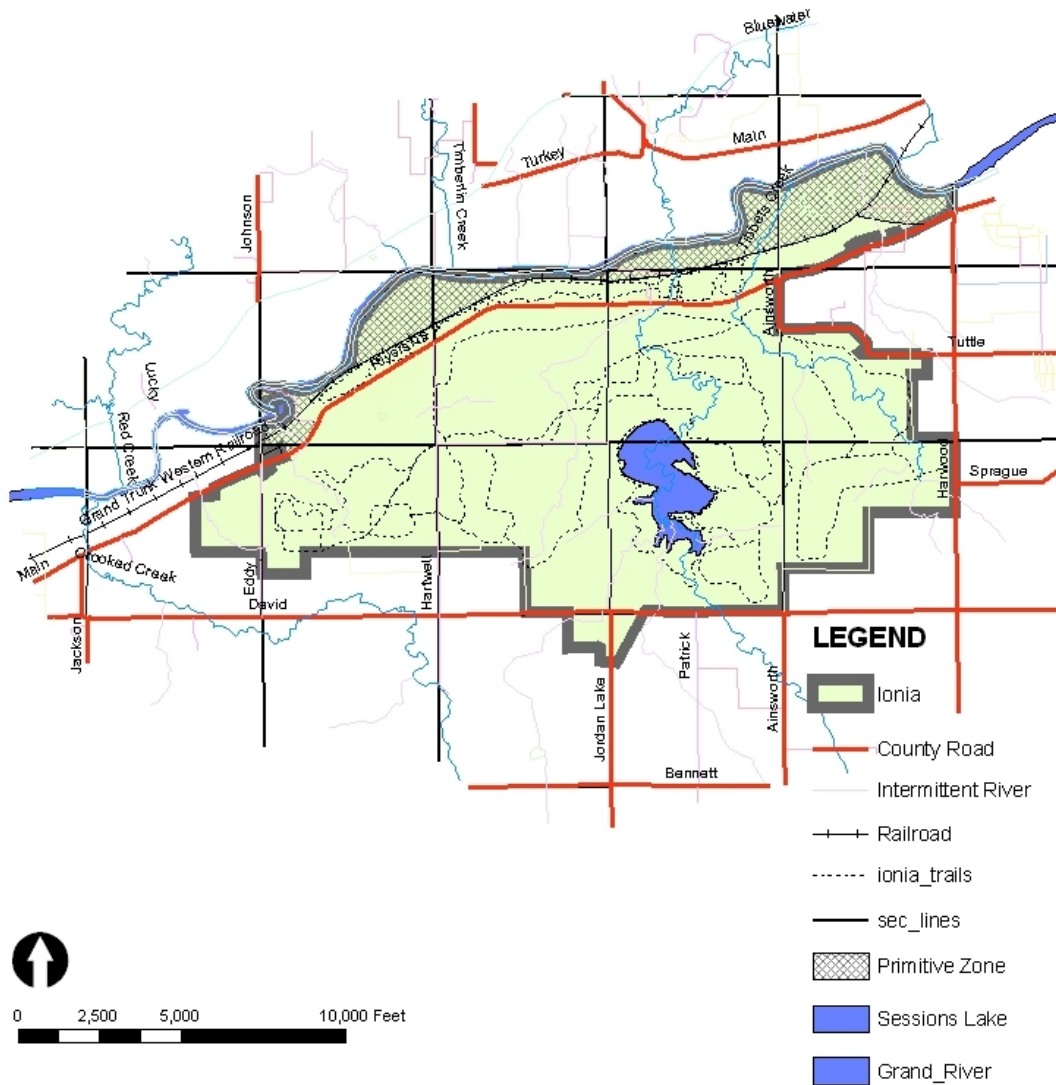
The Stewardship program developed the ["Phase II Natural Resources Management Plan – Ionia State Recreation Area"](#), which was drafted in March of 2004 (Palmgren). This plan presents an overall assessment of the natural resources of the park and provides specific prescriptive recommendations for management of the recreation area. In general, it calls for long-term efforts to reduce fragmentation of cover-type, control invasive species, and attain large, contiguous blocks of pre-settlement vegetation. Reference will be made to this report in the following zone descriptions.



(Map of Vegetative Management Units from the "Phase II Natural Resources Management Plan – Ionia State Recreation Area")

Primitive Zone

This zone is defined by the floodplain of the Grand River, bordered in general by the river to the north, and the Grand Rapids Eastern Railroad to the south.



In this 543 acre zone (12% of the park), it is not uncommon for spring floods to inundate the area with 5-10 feet of water every spring. The soils of the zone are highly organic silts, and easily subject to damage. Under the Primitive Zone designation, only foot traffic will be allowed...there will be no mountain bike or equestrian uses permitted.

The only exception to this is that an existing Grand River boat access carry-down site will be maintained for use on a seasonal basis (summer/fall). The Riverside Boating Access Site is located near the old Ionia County Infirmary area, with

access from the Riverside Picnic Area parking lot. The site is well established and provides a relatively short gravel entrance road and a small parking area suitable for 2-3 cars at the river access point.

At the west end of this zone is another river access route that has been closed for two years. Known as 'Stevens Point', this access location requires a long entrance road exceeding ½ mile in length. Maintenance of this road and the access location had been shown to be a challenge, given the impacts of flooding and natural change in the floodplain. In fact, a portion of the old access road was taken out by this year's flooding. Continued closure of this access is recommended.

Finally, an Ecologically Sensitive Zone designation has been identified at the far east end of the Primitive Zone. Following are the prescribed qualities for the Primitive Zone:

- Natural Resources – Within this Primitive Zone, the guidance of the Stewardship Plan is to "...maintain and restore high-quality floodplain forest north of the railroad tracks...". This area is classified as a southern floodplain forest that is characterized by nutrient rich wet soils. The Stewardship plan points to the importance of this floodplain forest, which acts as a buffer to keep excess sediments and nutrients from entering the Grand River.

The Grand River, which forms the northerly boundary of the zone, has been identified as habitat to several State Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern fresh water mussels. These are:

- Snuffbox mussel (State Endangered)
- Elktoe mussel (State Threatened)
- Purple wartyback mussel (State Special Concern)
- Round pigtoe mussel (State Special Concern)

Additionally, there are several locations along the Grand River where pockets of emergent marsh occur. These are typified by cat-tail marsh, water lilies, etc. The Blanding's turtle, a State Special Concern reptile, is known to dwell in these types of habitat. The protected area established by Steven's Point at the west end of the zone is one such location, and it also has potential for nesting habitat for the Trumpeter Swan.

(NOTE...a portion of this zone has been identified as an Ecologically Sensitive Zone. (zone description follows)

- Historic/Cultural Resources – No known historic sites or cultural resources exist in the floodplain. It is known that Native Americans settled nearby.

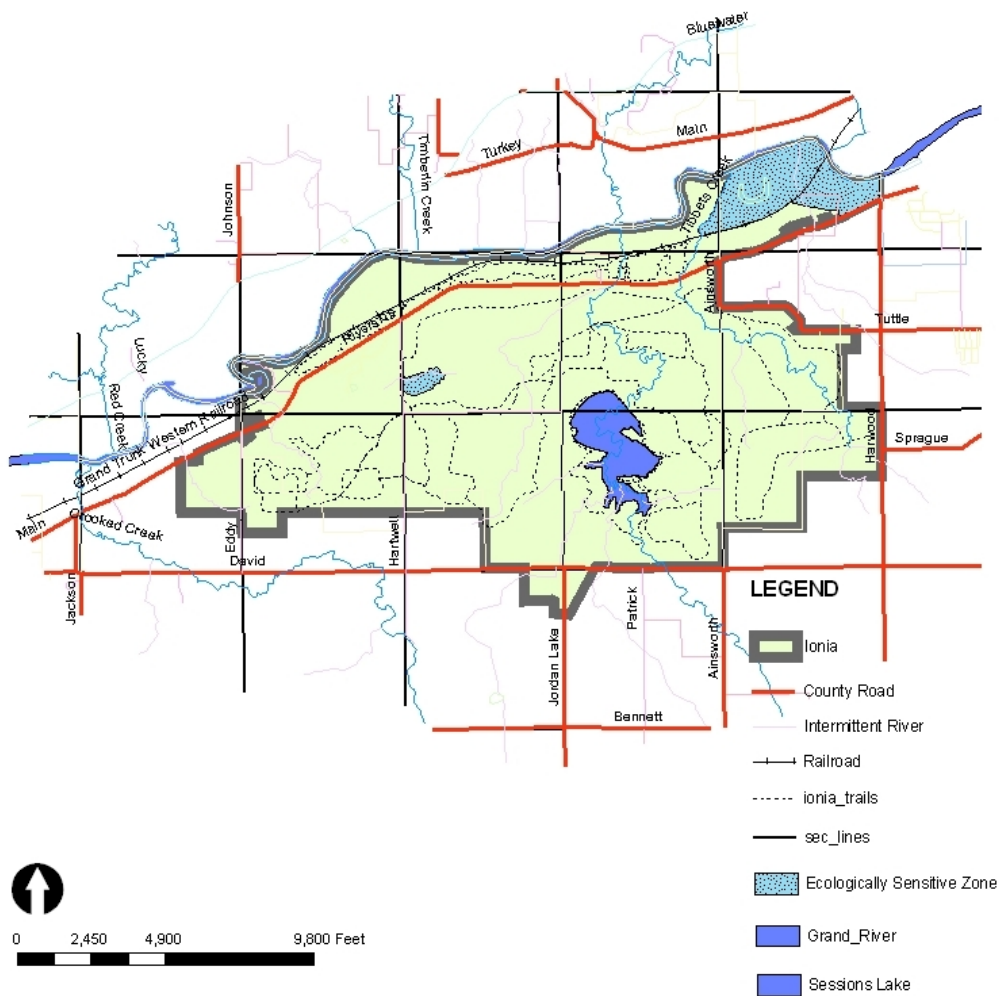
- Recreational Opportunities – With the focus of this zone being to maintain and restore the high-quality floodplain forest, and to protect the aquatic and emergent marsh environment, only low impact recreation will be allowed in the zone. This is characterized by dispersed recreation (such as hunting, trapping, birding and fishing) and the opportunity to develop foot trails. No equestrian or mountain bike trails will be allowed in this zone.

As noted in the general zone description, use and maintenance of the Riverside Boat Access Site will continue. The Steven's Point Access will continue to be closed, with its access route remaining in-place as a walking access down into the floodplain.

- Education Opportunities – The ecological significance of the southern floodplain forest, and the habitat that supports the rare aquatic and emergent marsh species, provides an excellent opportunity for educational kiosks at the points of entry to the zone (Steven's Point and Riverside). Additionally, off-site educational materials could be developed. Specific planning recommendations for education and interpretation will require input from the Office of Communications and others.
- Visitor Experience – This will reflect the high degree of 'natural' feel of the zone, a significant sense of solitude, and a lack of man-made improvements.
- Management Focus – Management of this zone will be focused on the Stewardship Plan recommendations for maintaining the low-impact character of the zone. Routine maintenance of any trails or routes of access will be provided, and care taken to eliminate any detrimental opportunities for erosion or sedimentation.
- Development - Only trail improvements (can include boardwalks and/or overlooks) and educational or interpretive signage will be the evidence of man-made elements in this zone. Any improvements needed for resource protection, such as erosion control, shall be 'natural' in character. The focus is to maintain as little evidence of human activity as possible.

Ecologically Sensitive Zone

There are two areas in the park with this designation, and a third, more generic characterization of the grassland components of the "Field Trial Course Zone". The largest designated area is located in the Primitive Zone (in the northeast corner of the park). This tract of approximately 208 acres has been identified for purposes of protecting two active bald eagle nests and a heron rookery. The second designated area is located within the wildlife floodings found in the Field Trial Course Zone. It is comprised of approximately 19 acres that have been the nesting location of trumpeter swans. This zone represents approximately 5% of the total park acreage. The third area is the grasslands of the field trial courses, that have found favor with protected upland birds, including the Henslow's sparrow and the grasshopper sparrow, as well as species in decline, such as the bob-o-link and eastern meadowlark.



This zone designation carries with it a 'Seasonal' condition that protects the eagle, heron, swan and upland bird habitats during active nesting (February 1 to July 15). This 'season' impacts hunting in these specific areas. All of the values of the Primitive Zone and Field Trial Zone apply to these respective areas, and additionally, the following values will be attained:

- Natural Resources – **Maintaining the integrity of the natural habitat of the eagle nests, heron rookery, swan nesting area, and upland bird grassland habitat is the primary purpose of this designation.** While selective tree harvest and vegetative management (controlled burns or mowing) to address invasive species or re-establish native systems or maintenance of the field trial grounds is allowed, no such measures will take place during the 'season' of this zone. Where field trial activities may conflict, those will be re-routed so as not to interfere with the nesting activities of the upland birds (ie. Henslow's sparrow).
- Historic/Cultural Resources – No known historic sites or cultural resources exist in the floodplain or wildlife floodings. It is known that Native Americans settled within the park.
- Recreation Opportunities – Public entry into this zone will not be allowed during the zone season, so that the eagles, herons, trumpeter swans, and Henslow's sparrows stay undisturbed during the time of nesting. During the hunting season (September 15 to April 1) access for hunting in this zone will only be allowed from September 15 to February 1. On February 1, the restrictions of the zone take place.

The potential exists for future use of the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad line as a linear trail. Should that progress to reality, management of that use would have to be addressed to respect the defined needs of the zone.

- Education Opportunities – Interpretation of the eagles, herons, trumpeter swans, and Henslow's sparrow can take place outside the zone, and can be incorporated in the materials for the Primitive Zone, Field Trial Zone and Developed Recreation Zone. Conflict between the protective measures of the zone and hunting and field trial opportunities also represents a good opportunity for education.
- Visitor Experience – During the zone season, no access will be allowed. When outside of the season, the visitor will experience the high degree of 'natural' feel of the zone, a significant sense of solitude, and a lack of man-made improvements.
- Management Focus – Management of this zone will be focused on the Stewardship Plan recommendations for maintaining the low-impact

character of the zone. During the zone season, efforts will be made to keep human activity out of the zone.

The Field Trial Courses, having been managed as a grassland habitat for field trialing, are also favorable for protected and declining species of upland birds, including:

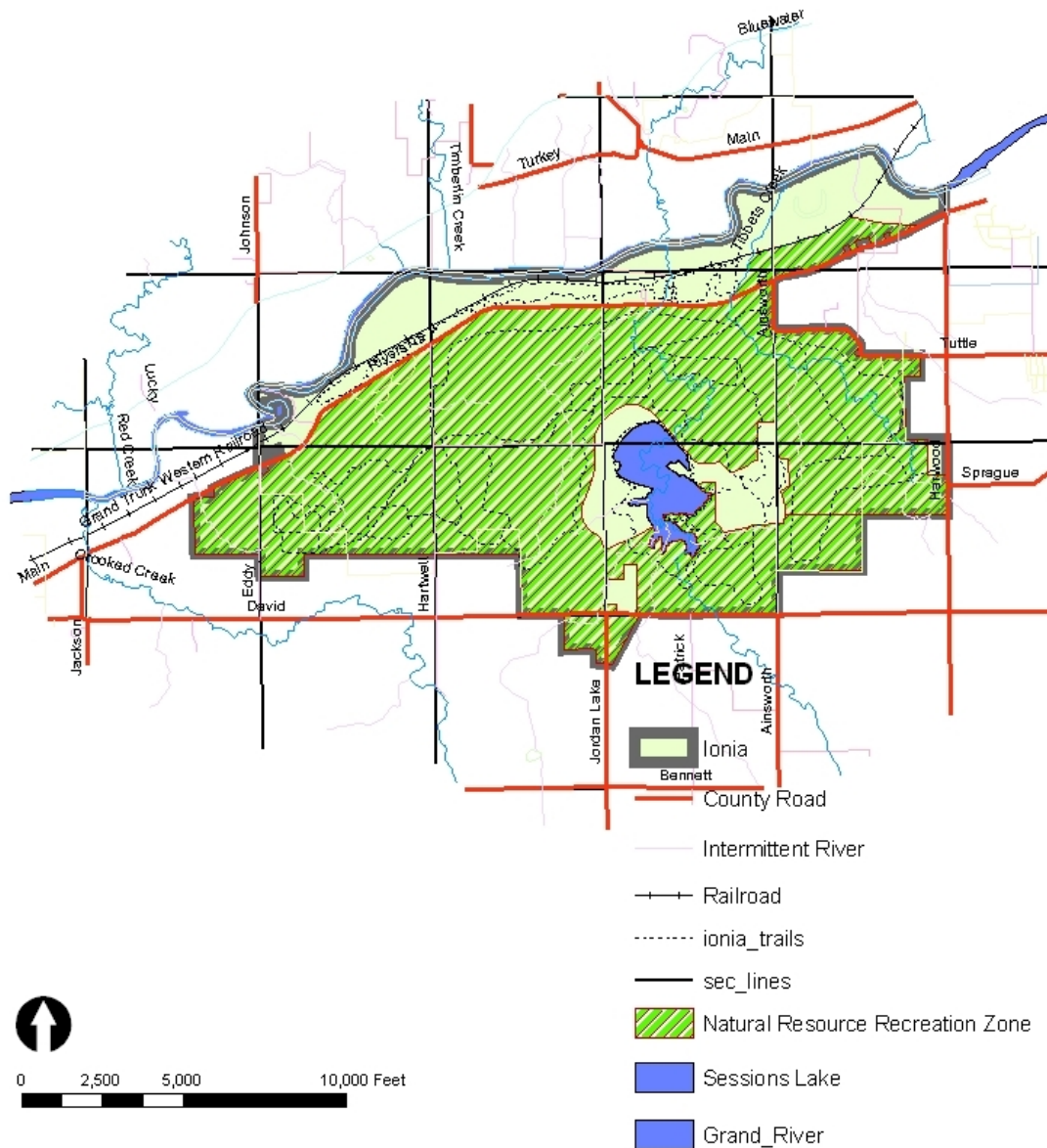
- Henslow's sparrow (State Threatened)
- Grasshopper sparrow (Special Concern)
- Bob-o-links (in decline)
- Eastern meadowlark (in decline)

The specific management guidance for these birds will be addressed in the "Field Trial Grounds Management Plan", but it should be expected that there will be some impact on the management regime for the field trial courses, and the running of events.

- Development - Any improvements needed for resource protection, such as erosion control, shall be 'natural' in character. If implemented, these types of improvements will be made during the off-season of the zone.

Natural Resource Recreation Zone

The Natural Resource Recreation Zone is the largest zone in the park, with 3,113 acres comprising 70% of the total.



It is utilized for general recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and trail use for hiking, cross-country skiing and equestrian use. Also within this zone is a special use for field trials. A 'non-standard' zone (Field Trial Course Zone) has been established to address the specific management needs for this use. The Natural Resource Recreation Zone is described as follows:

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Stewardship Plan. Much of this zone is what the Stewardship Plan refers to as 'Mesic Southern Forest' (Beech – Sugar Maple). The majority of the recreation area was mesic southern forest in the 1800's, prior to European settlement and subsequent clearing for agriculture.

Cited in the Stewardship Plan is the following notation..."In the state park system, only Warren Woods still has an exemplary example of beech-maple forest, but it is less than 200 acres and surrounded by private land on all sides. Only Ionia State Recreation Area and possibly Maybury State Park have the potential to restore larger blocks of this forest in the foreseeable future." (Palmgren, 2004).

The primary long-term goal for this zone, outside of the Field Trial Course sub-Zone, is restoration of large contiguous blocks of beech-maple forest. In general, this will happen naturally, but it can be augmented with the planting of local genotype beech and sugar-maple trees.

Other Stewardship guidance for this zone includes:

- Control of invasive species such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, glossy buckthorn, garlic mustard, phragmites, purple loosestrife and various non-native pines.
- Eco-system management that promotes the strengthening of native (natural) communities. As such, the habitat values for all endemic species will benefit.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from historic European settlements scattered throughout this recreation area.
- Recreation Opportunities – This zone is utilized for general recreation, including; hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and trail use for hiking, cross-country skiing and equestrian use.

Also within this zone is a special use zone for field trials. Continuation of these recreational opportunities, in concert with the special impacts of the Field Trial Course Zone will be the focus of future action plans.

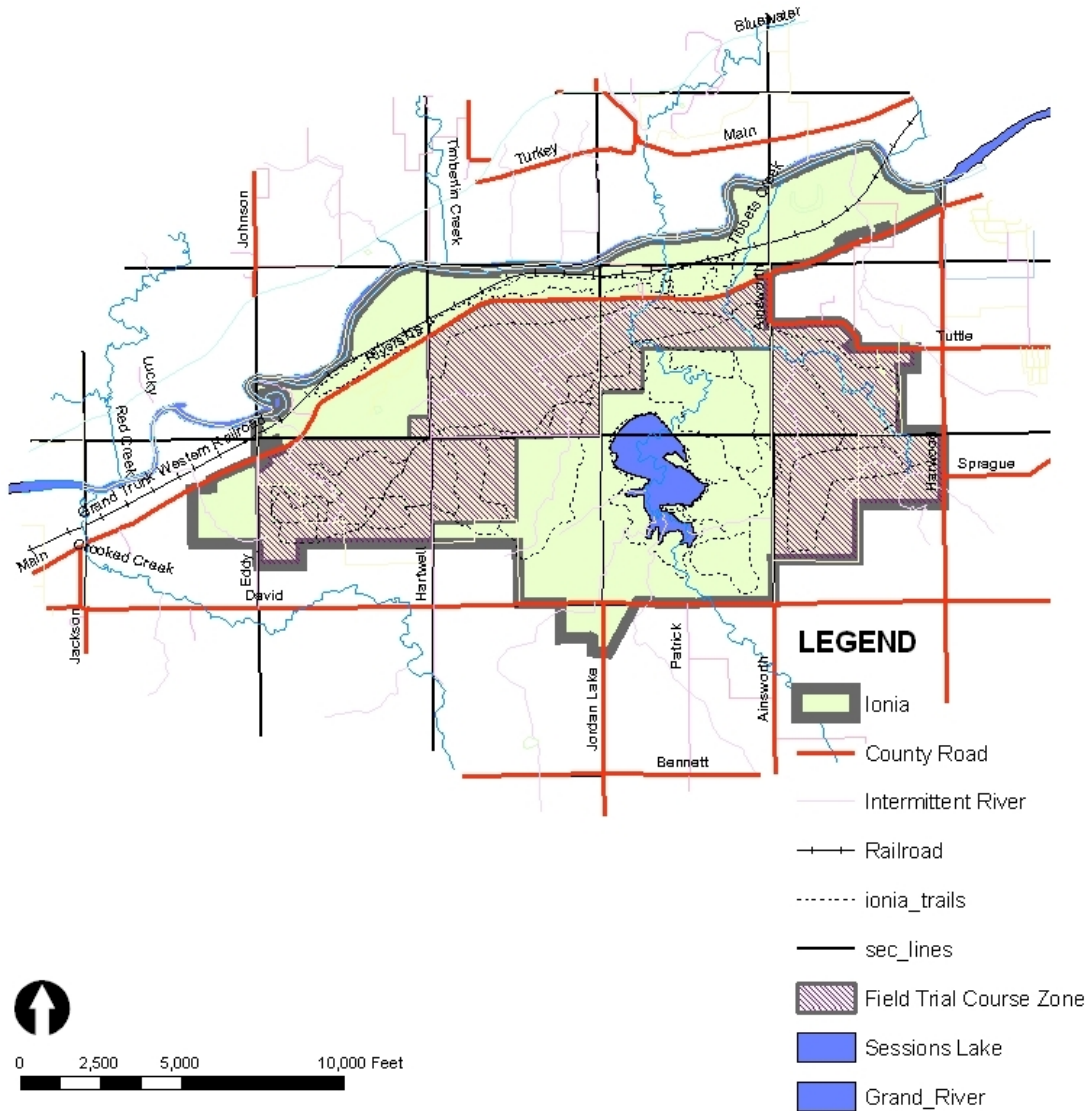
- Education Opportunities – As identified in the Executive Summary, there is a well supported need for education of park users as to the various impacts in the park, not the least of which are the field trial activities. The primary means of user access is by the various trails that extend throughout the zone. Informational kiosks at trail heads and along the trails at critical locations is appropriate. Also appropriate is the education of park visitors to the Developed Recreation Zone, and specifically the campground users.

In concert with this is the need to provide the same types of information and education to park visitors whose purpose of being at Ionia SRA is the use of the Field Trial Course Zone. The Field Trial Headquarters and the parking lot for Course #2 are the staging locations for all field trial activities. Informational kiosks at these locations would benefit all.

- Visitor Experience – Given the significant impacts of the Field Trial Course Zone, the visitor can expect encounters with other park visitors (field trialers, dogs and horses) during the prime field trial use period of April – June and August – November. Conflicts impacting hunting and trail uses can occur as a result. Outside of the Field Trial Course Zone, the overall character of the visitor experience will be one of relative solitude.
- Management Focus – Do everything possible to minimize potential conflicts discussed above. Implement educational efforts.
- Development – Development activity will focus on complimenting the educational efforts to reduce conflict. One known need is to address points of conflict between the field trial course route and the existing equestrian trails, which will likely lead to relocation of some trail segments and/or new trail development.

Field Trial Course Zone

The “Field Trial Course Zone” is a (substantial) subset of the Natural Resources Recreation Zone. It encompasses 1,969 acres representing 45% of the park. This is a specific (non-standard) zone that recognizes the NRC designation of Ionia SRA for ‘championship’ field trial purposes.



The Field Trial Course Zone carries with it specific uses, natural resource management, and visitor use management. Within Course #2 of the Zone is the

potential for designation of an Ecologically Sensitive Zone in the wildlife flooding areas (noted above). This designation will be made only if the occurrence of nesting trumpeter swans takes place. Activation of an Ecologically Sensitive Zone has the potential of impacting field trial activities. Retriever trials would not be allowed in the zone if so applied. Pointer trial activities would not be affected by this designation.

The Field Trial Courses, having been managed as a grassland habitat for field trialing, are also favorable for protected and declining species of upland birds, including:

- Henslow's sparrow (State Threatened)
- Grasshopper sparrow (Special Concern)
- Bob-o-links (in decline)
- Eastern meadowlark (in decline)

The specific management guidance for these birds will be addressed in the "Field Trial Grounds Management Plan", but it should be expected that there will be some impact on the management regime for the field trial courses, and the running of events.

- Natural Resources – Specific to this zone, the 'Ionia Field Trial Grounds Management Plan' is being developed with input from the field trialers and Wildlife Division. In general, the premise of natural resource management in this zone is that it will meet the needs of field trialing. The new plan will identify specific use areas within the zone for active field trial course management. In so doing, it will also identify areas within the zone where the Stewardship goals for expansion of beech-maple forests can be met.

Field trial courses are managed for large contiguous open fields where the dogs can run to "objectives" for purposes of flushing target birds that have been set by the field trialers. Fields are defined by woods/shrub growth that is routinely maintained to prevent encroachment into the trial field, and/or by fencing.

The vegetative cover of the fields will be identified in the final "Ionia Field Trial Grounds Management Plan" referenced above.

Other Stewardship guidance for this zone includes:

- Control of invasive species such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, glossy buckthorn, garlic mustard, phragmites, purple loosestrife and various non-native pines.

- Eco-system management that promotes the strengthening of native (natural) communities. As such, the habitat values for all endemic species will benefit.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from historic European – American settlements scattered throughout this recreation area.
- Recreation Opportunities – The primary use of this zone is for field trial activities, including the conduct of organized trials and dog training. This is not an exclusive use...the zone is also open for general recreation, including; hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and trail use for hiking, cross-country skiing and equestrian use.
- Education Opportunities – As identified in the Executive Summary, there is a well supported need for education of park users as to the various impacts in the park, not the least of which are the field trial activities. The primary means of user access is by the various trails that extend throughout the zone. Informational kiosks at trail heads and along the trails at critical locations is appropriate. Also appropriate is the education of park visitors to the Developed Recreation Zone, and specifically the campground users.

In concert with this is the need to provide the same types of information and education to park visitors whose purpose of being at Ionia SRA is the use of the Field Trial Course Zone. The Field Trial Headquarters and the parking lot for Course #2 are the staging locations for all field trial activities. Informational kiosks at these locations would benefit all.

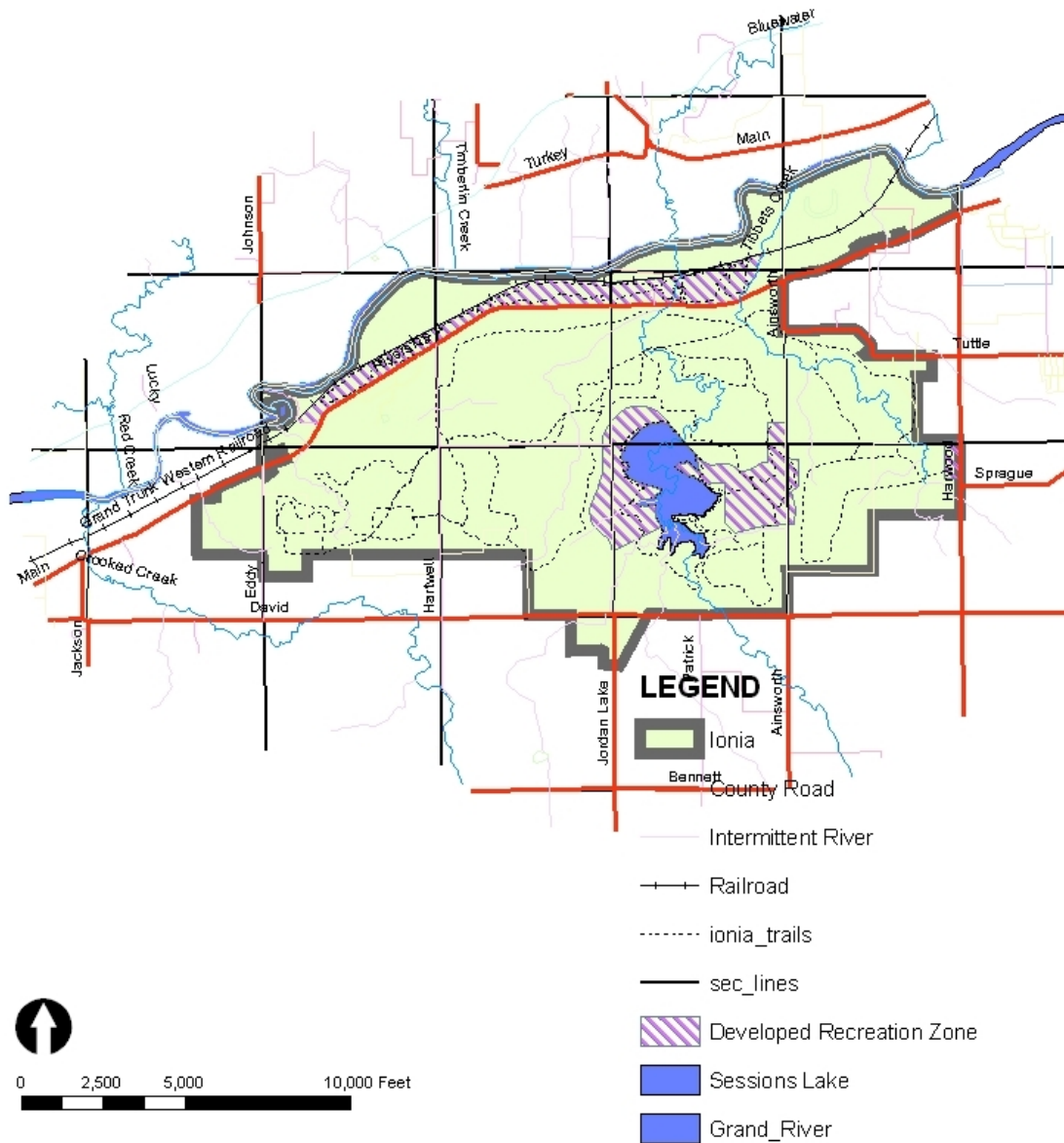
- Visitor Experience – There are two categories of visitor to this zone. One is the field trialer and those who come to watch this activity. Their experience will be one of being able to conduct their sport/recreation at a field trial course of national caliber. The grounds will be maintained to establish and maintain the proper conditions for field trial activities.

The other category of visitor is the non-field trialer who utilizes this zone for other recreational pursuits. Field trialing is not an exclusive use. However, during the active times of year for field trials (April–June and August–November), the experience of other users will be tempered by any field trial activities that may be taking place. During these timeframes, they can expect encounters with field trialers, dogs and horses. Conflicts impacting hunting, birding, trail and other uses can occur as a result, and are the basis for unique management challenges.

- Management Focus – Do everything possible to minimize potential conflicts discussed above. Implement educational efforts. Oversee the conduct of the Ionia Field Trial Grounds Committee in their management of the trial grounds and their obligations under the lease agreement for the headquarters and parking area for Course #2.
- Development – Development will focus on the reduction of conflict and increased suitability of the Field Trial Zone for that activity. One known need is to address points of conflict between the field trial course route and the existing equestrian trails, which will likely lead to relocation of some trail segments and/or new trail development. To augment this need to reduce conflict, in areas that cannot be corrected by trail separation, appropriate signage will be placed cautioning users of the potential for contact with others. Another potential development activity is the placement of fencing to ensure the protection of the dogs.

Developed Recreation Zone

There are three separate areas with this designation. It totals 492 acres, or 11% of the total park.



The first and largest is 249 acres that incorporate all of the modern campgrounds, equestrian campground, day-use areas, boat launch and

equestrian staging area. These are all well defined use areas centered on Sessions Lake, and developed for intensive recreational use.

The second is the mountain bike trail that is bounded by the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad line to the north and Riverside Drive to the south. As an old gravel pit/borrow area, the natural resource condition of this 229 acre zone is low, and opportunity for trail expansion high. Day-use access to this area is primarily from the Riverside Drive Picnic Area parking lot. Campers gain access to these trails by way of the old Jordan Lake Road trail that begins at a small parking area near the entrance to the beach, and goes due north to the Posse House (and access to the Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Trail).

The third segment of Developed Recreation Zone is a subset of the Field Trial Course Zone. At the Ionia Field Trialers Headquarters, approximately 14 acres of land at the far east end of the park are developed for administration of field trials with a headquarters building, barn with stables, large parking area, and facilities for overnight stays by field trial participants. It is intensively used during the field trial 'season' of March through June and September through October.

- Natural Resources –In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Stewardship Plan. Where opportunities are available to enhance the mesic southern forest (beech-maple) within this zone, it will be a priority.

There are non-native plantings of pine in this zone that will be ultimately removed from the landscape. Other Stewardship guidance for this zone includes:

- Control of invasive species such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, glossy buckthorn, garlic mustard, phragmites, and purple loosestrife.
- Eco-system management that promotes the strengthening of native (natural) communities. As such, the habitat values for all endemic species will benefit.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from historic European settlements scattered throughout this recreation area.
- Recreation Opportunities – This is the focus of this zone. Camping, picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming and other general recreational activities are provided and encouraged. Hunting is not allowed within 450' (Hunting Safety Zone) of the campgrounds or buildings.

Consolidation of services for improved management and improved visitor experience, is a serious possibility that merits equal consideration. Access to the camping areas requires the traverse of a long route around Sessions Lake to get to a campground that is located away from the lake. The lake is one feature of Ionia SRA that most visitors come to see, use and appreciate, yet in the current configuration, this becomes a real effort. Located east of the lake and up on a wooded hill, the lake is visible to a handful of campsites, and then only marginally (and with the aid of pruning).

The long-range (10-year) Action Plan should evaluate alternatives to the existing configuration of 'Developed Recreation' facilities in this park to provide better access to the key feature (Sessions Lake) that made this park possible. This evaluation should look at:

- Modern Campground
 - Equestrian Campground
 - Equestrian Staging Area
 - Organization Campground
 - Field Trial HQ and Staging Area
- Education Opportunities – In this most populated and visited of zones in the park is the most opportunity for education and interpretation. The 'State Park Explorer Program' takes advantage of this in recruiting interest from campers for their interpretive programming, and this can be expanded upon. This program to date has focused on the 'Learn to Fish' program, interpretation of park flora and fauna, and exploration of the history of the park.

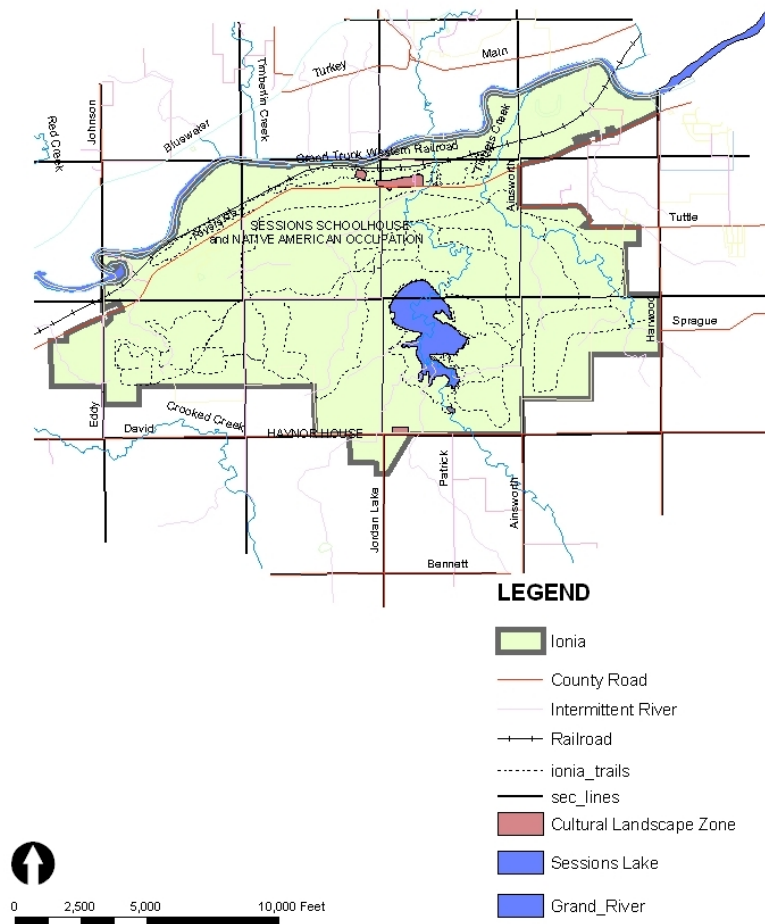
The opportunity exists for an expanded educational focus in this zone on the activities associated with Field Trials.

- Visitor Experience – With the focus of this zone being the developed campgrounds and other attributes, the visitor will experience a high level of encounters with other park visitors during the summer months. As with many parks, early and late season use is greatly diminished. Hunting is not allowed within 450' (Hunting Safety Zone) of the campgrounds or buildings. Note...the Sheriff's Posse House shooting range operation is located in close proximity to the mountain bike trails, and represents an incompatible use with the trail use of this area.
- Management Focus – Maintain the infrastructure that serves the intense public uses of this zone. Provide educational opportunities in the zone for the entire park, develop and maintain ADA access in the zone, and maintain public safety and good hospitality practices.

- Development – Provide ADA improvements as needed to attain ‘program’ accessibility. Improve facilities to compliment education. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

Cultural Landscape Zone

This zone identifies known cultural resources within Ionia SRA. Approximately 21 acres of the park have been so designated. The primary areas within this zone are located along Riverside Drive, and encompass the Posse House, the Sessions Schoolhouse, the County Cemetery, and an area anecdotally attributed to Native American occupation. Two other distinct locations include the Haynor House along David Highway, just east of the park entrance, and the foundation remnants of an old mill site on Sessions Creek, upstream of the lake. Of note is the fact that throughout the park are scattered remnants of old farmsteads.



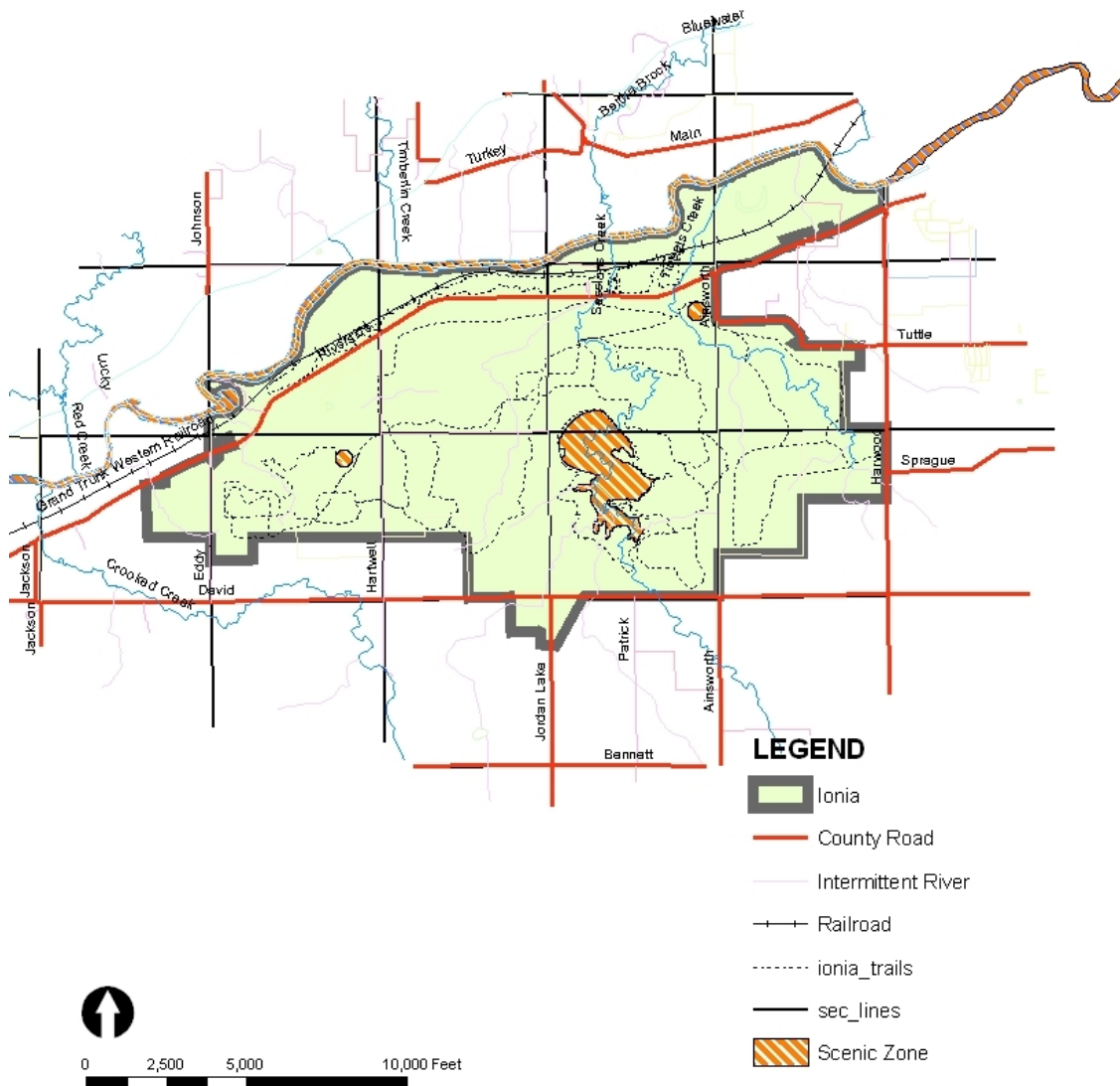
- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Stewardship Plan, and does not interfere with the cultural values identified.

These cultural sites impact both the Natural Resource Recreation Zone and the Developed Recreation Zone, and as such, the guidance for these zones will apply to the Cultural Landscape elements found within them.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from historic European settlements scattered throughout this recreation area.
- Recreation Opportunities – This zone is established to highlight the historic and cultural qualities of times past. The recreation opportunities afforded in this zone will not interfere with nor hinder the appreciation of the cultural landscape being preserved. Note...the Sheriff's Posse House shooting range operation is located at the old school house, and represents an incompatible use with the historic/cultural qualities of the site.
- Education Opportunities – Information regarding the key elements in this zone can be made available at the individual sites, and fortified through educational opportunities in the Developed Recreation Zone as well. The placement of informational kiosks is appropriate.
- Visitor Experience – The cultural features highlighted in this zone are representative of some of the earliest settlement activity in Ionia County. This rich heritage will be appreciated by visitors with an interest in history. The visitor can expect encounters with other park visitors (mountain bikers and field trialers, dogs and horses) during the spring, summer and fall seasons of the year.
- Management Focus – Preserve the historic integrity of the zone elements identified, and implement educational efforts.
- Development – Development activity will focus on any identified restoration/preservation needs, accommodating visitor access to the features, and meeting ADA and educational/interpretation needs.

Scenic Zone

This incorporates the Grand River frontage of the park, Sessions Lake, and several scenic vista locations within the interior of the park.

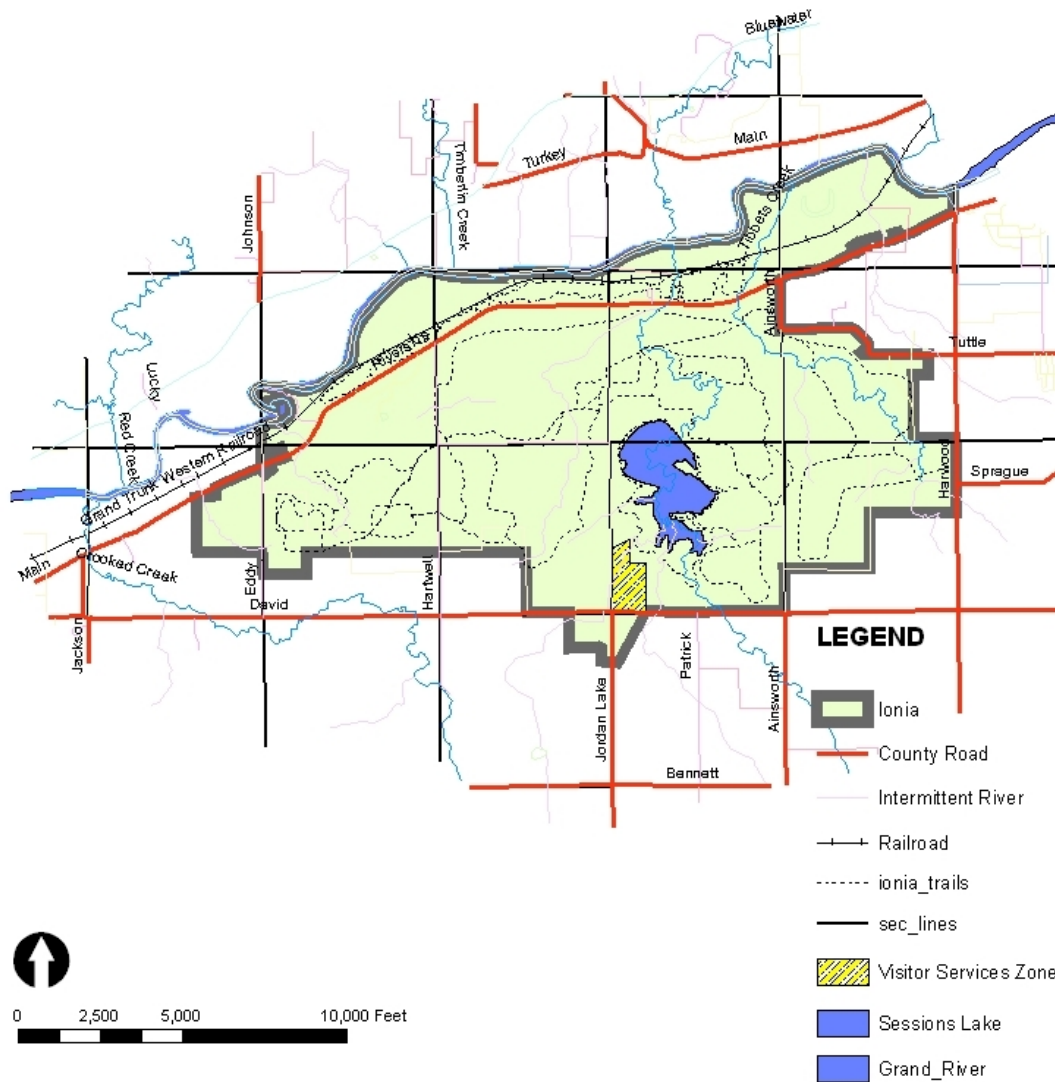


The Grand River frontage is approximately five miles in length and is bordered by the floodplain of the Primitive Zone. The shore is natural and undeveloped on both sides of the river. The scenic views within the park take advantage of the elevation change and offer long lines of site to the river valley, the surrounding wooded ridgelines, and Sessions Lake.

- Natural Resources –In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Stewardship Plan, and it does not hinder the scenic opportunities provided.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from historic European settlements scattered throughout this recreation area.
- Recreation Opportunities – Trail access to these scenic areas will provide viewing opportunities. The riverfront portion can be viewed from the water by passing boaters, or from shore at the boat access site or the trail at Steven's Point. The scenic vistas are adjacent to the equestrian trail at the west end of the park, and the field trial trail in Course #2. Various viewing locations of the lake exist from the campground and from the circulation routes around the lake.
- Education Opportunities – There is a great opportunity for interpretive signage along the trails and at the view points. Education today is focused on what happens inland. There are certainly opportunities to provide additional focus on the Grand River and its floodplain, as well as the development of the lake.
- Visitor Experience – The scenic view locations are in areas of low visitor impact. The general experience will be one of solitude.
- Management Focus – Management must focus on maintenance of the views, and protection of the resource. The westerly view point is currently degraded by ad hoc horse trails.
- Development – Any development in this zone must compliment the viewing opportunities. Educational kiosks and improvements to augment educational opportunities are desirable actions. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

Visitor Services Zone

This zone is well defined, located just north of the entrance to the park. It has 43 acres, just less than 1% of the park.



The zone encompasses the developed areas required for program administration and operations. Typically it will include offices, contact stations, maintenance facilities and all related land base required to conduct the business of running a state park or recreation area. At Ionia, additional land immediately north of the current office/shop area has been included in this zone for purposes of future expansion or relocation.

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support the needs for administration of the park.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – There are no known H/C Resources in this zone.
- Recreation Opportunities – Part of this zone is outside of the Hunter Safety Zone (450' from buildings), and is open for hunting.
- Education Opportunities – Educational materials can be made available in the office 'public space', and office staff can provide verbal information. There is a great opportunity to direct visitors to other informational locations in the park.
- Visitor Experience – Visitor access at the office is limited to informational purposes. Part of this zone is outside of the Hunter Safety Zone (450' from buildings), and is open for hunting.
- Management Focus – Provide public access (ADA) to the office from the parking lot, and (ADA) access within the building. Assure security of offices, facilities and equipment. Provide a safe working environment for staff.
- Development – Development in this zone will be for purposes of complimenting the administrative needs of the park, and meeting the needs for ADA compliance. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

FUTURE PLAN INSERTS

10-Year Action Plan (LONG-RANGE ACTION GOALS TO ATTAIN GMP) - Phase-2 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan.

5-Year Action Plan (SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT) - Phase-3 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan and Phase 2 Plan.

Annual Action Plan and Progress Report - Phase-4 of the Management Planning Process.

Field Trial Grounds Management Plan – With input from the Ionia Field Trial Association, various field trial clubs, and Wildlife Division, PRD-Stewardship is charged with the development of this document. The Field Trial Grounds Management Plan will serve to provide specific direction and guidance for management of the field trial courses.

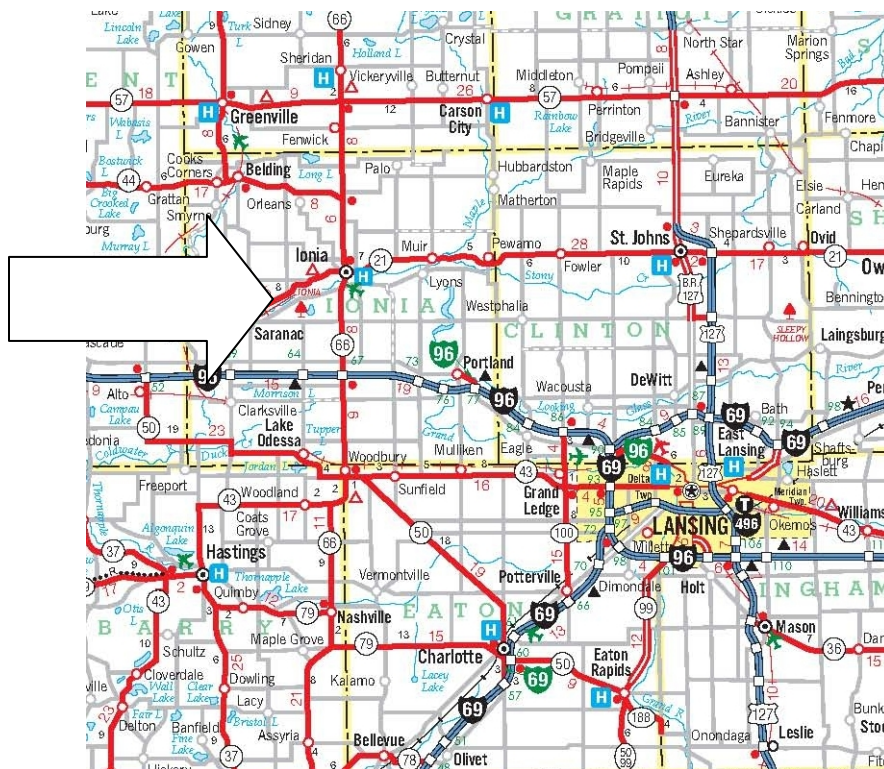
Operational/Management Resources - The following categories are established as a guide for the park manager to use to supplement this working document. Other categories can be added as needed.

- Annual Work Plan (NOTE...this will tie-in with Phase 4 – Annual Report of Management Planning)
- Staffing
- Budget
- Equipment
- Training
- Public Relations / Marketing / Outreach
- Programming (ie. special events, MCCC, volunteers, etc.)
- Public Health, Safety, and Welfare
 - Water system
 - Wastewater system
 - Electrical system
 - Law enforcement
 - Emergency Access Plan
 - Wildfire Management Plan
 - Dam Safety Reports
- CRS
- FOIA
- [Raster Image Index](#)
- [Raster Images of historic park plans](#)
- Park Infrastructure data

SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Park Setting -

- LOCATION AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITY – Ionia State Recreation Area is located approximately two miles southwest of Ionia and a like distance east of the village of Saranac, in Ionia County. It is bounded by the Grand River to the north and David Highway to the south. The entire park is within Berlin Township. The primary access to the park is from David Highway, with several parking areas found along county roads around its perimeter. The Jordan Lake Road exit from I-96 is approximately 3.5 miles due south of the park entrance, and is a primary route of access to the park. This is a two-lane primary county road. Two other primary county roads provide access to the park. David Highway connects with M-66 to the east of the park and Riverside Drive connects the north end of the park to both Saranac and Ionia. All county road(s) access to the park is subject to seasonal load restrictions and weight limits.

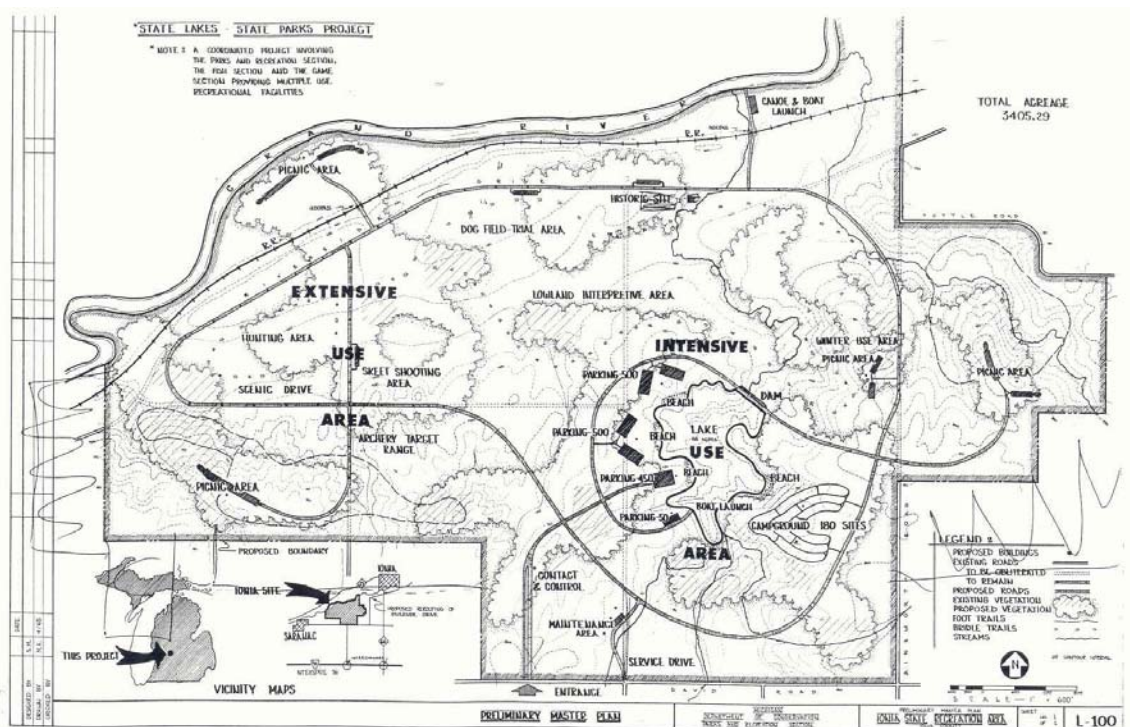


The city of Ionia to the northeast of the park has a 2000 Census population of 10,569. The Village of Saranac, due west of the park has a 2000 Census population of 1,326. The 2000 Census population of Ionia County is 63,573, which reflects a 7.9% increase over the 1990 Census

figures. The relative density of the county at 107.3 persons per square mile (p/sm) is significantly less than the state average of 175 p/sm, and is reflective of the agricultural use of land in the county.

- **GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PARK** – In the early 1960's, the Department of Conservation proposed a program to build 50 'State Lakes' in the lower peninsula's "lakeless" area of the state. The purpose of this initiative was to construct new water bodies in the lakeless area of the state for purposes of providing centers for outdoor recreation. A priority of these lake parks would be given to fishing and high water quality for swimming, with park and outdoor recreation activities to take place on the uplands.

In a 1964 study of the Upper Grand River Basin, nine sites were identified as having potential to meet the needs of the State Lakes program. In 1965, Parks Division conducted a detailed study of the Ionia area which ultimately resulted in development of the final recommendation and proposed 'Master Plan' for what would become "Ionia State Recreation Area". Upon presentation of this recommendation, Ionia State Recreation Area was dedicated in May of 1965 by the Conservation Commission.



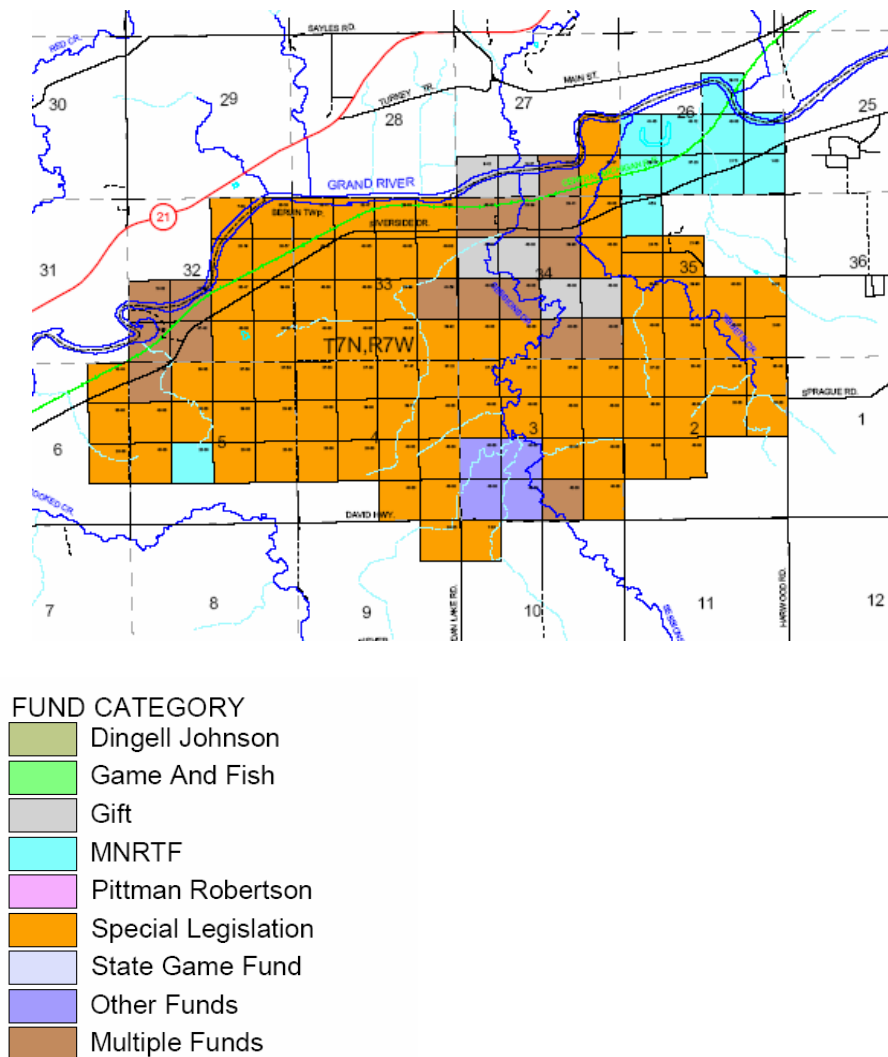
Based on the boundary defined in the 1965 master plan, the Department began to acquire lands needed for development of this new park. The first lands acquired were by gift of a 320 acre parcel from Ionia County of the

old Ionia County Home. Through subsequent acquisitions over time, Ionia SRA today represents 4,418 acres of public recreation lands, with five miles of frontage on the Grand River, and a 140 acre man-made lake.

Ionia SRA is within one hour's drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Lansing, and 16.4% of the population of Michigan. (1,629,900 people)

- LAND OWNERSHIP AND ISSUES – State ownership of the lands that make up Ionia SRA has been acquired through a variety of funding sources.

LAND PURCHASE FUNDING SOURCES (from MDNR – Land Information System)



- Following are descriptions of the impacts of these various sources:
 - Special Legislation – The majority of the total park acreage has been acquired with this source. It is utilized for general program purposes.
 - Gift – A portion of the park acreage was acquired by gift. It is utilized for general program purposes.
 - Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) – Is utilized for general program purposes.
 - Multiple Funds and Other Funds – Is utilized for general program purposes.
- One specific acquisition of land is the “Posse House”, an old school house located on Riverside Drive. This 0.4 acre parcel with structure was deeded to the state in 1966 by Ionia County, with a specific requirement “for right of use of the former school house and said land as granted to the Sheriff’s Posse of Ionia County by the County of Ionia



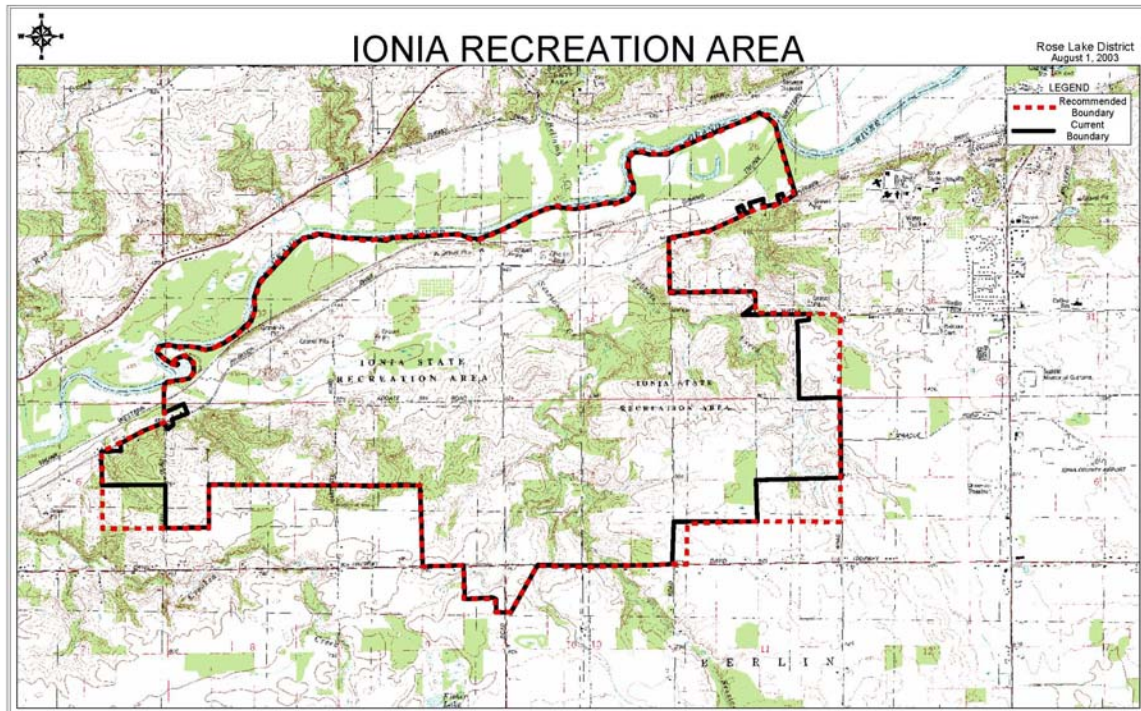
- On 2/25/2005, the Ionia Field Trial Grounds Association (IFTGA)entered into a lease with the State of Michigan (DNR) for specific lands, facilities, and uses of Ionia SRA for Field Trial purposes.
- Letter of Understanding with Ionia County that places maintenance responsibility for the Ionia County Infirmary Cemetery with the DNR in perpetuity.
- Letter of Understanding with the John Smith family that they can farm the southeast corner of DNR land south of David Highway.

- Historic designation of the Sessions School House ... maintenance that is historically correct...no alterations...etc.



- NRC dedication of the Championship Courses at Ionia provides specific, legal description of those lands.
- R.O.W.'s....County Road Commission and Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad
- Permit Issues:
 - Lagoon maintenance
 - Dam Safety requirements
 - . Sessions Lake Dam and Sediment Control Dams
 - . Wildlife flooding dams (Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act of 1979 – PA203)

- The Natural Resource Commission has approved a recommended boundary change for the park that includes additional land to the west and east ends of the park.

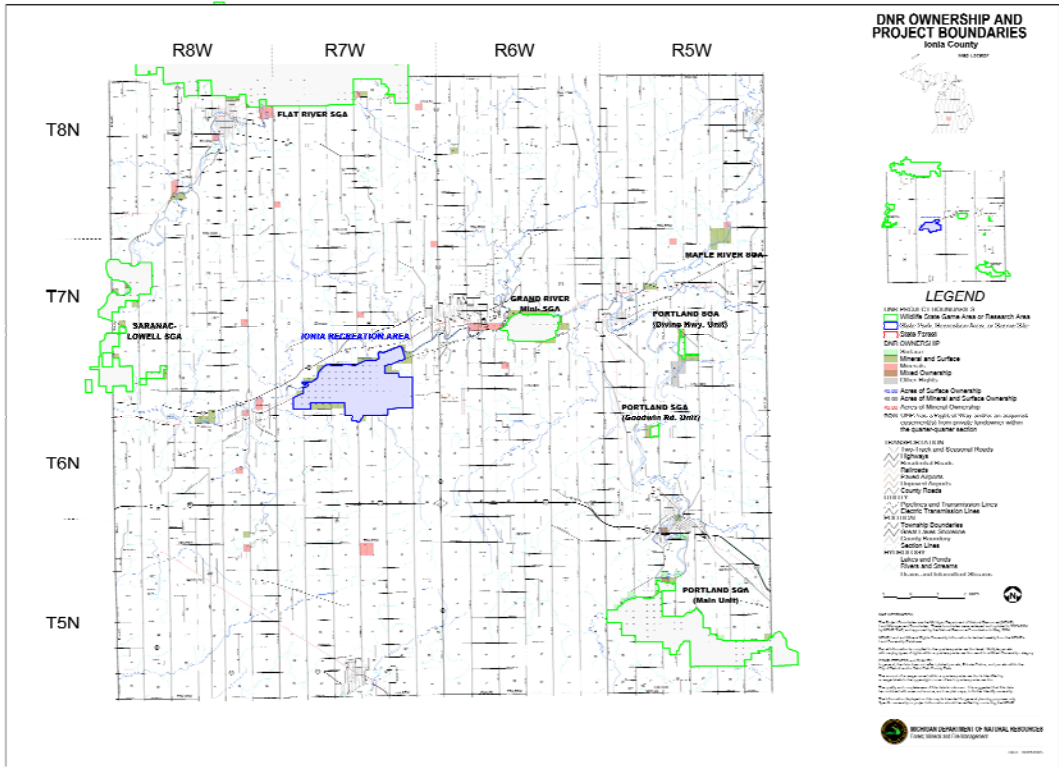


- RELATIONSHIP OF IONIA SRA TO OTHER RECREATION RESOURCES – In Ionia County, there is one State Park...Ionia State Recreation Area. There are five Wildlife Division administered 'State Game Areas' (SGA), one of which has two additional smaller units. They are:

- Flat River SGA
- Saranac-Lowell SGA
- Portland SGA (Main Unit)
 - Divine Highway Unit
 - Goodwin Road Unit
- Maple River SGA
- Grand River mini SGA

Additionally, there are nine Department administered "Boating Access Sites" in Ionia County.

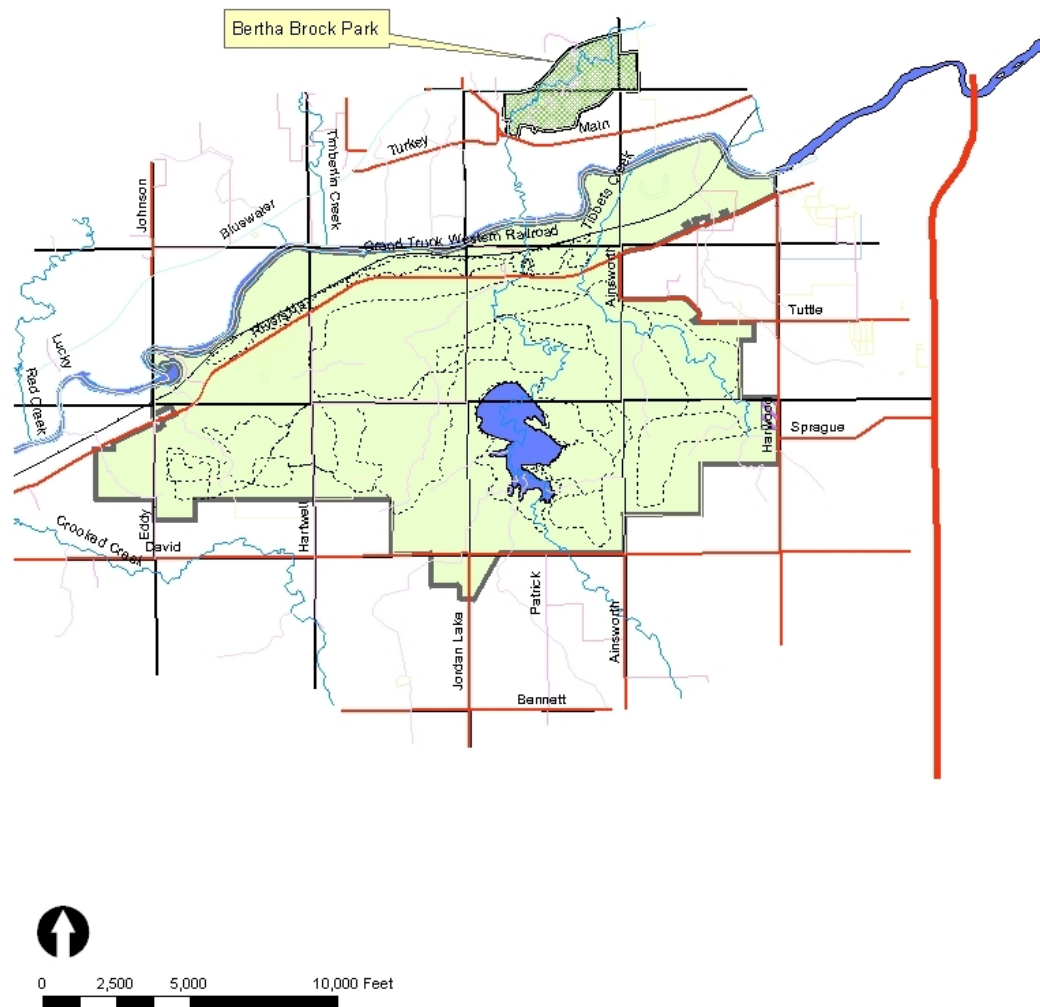
Map of DNR Major Land Holdings in Ionia County



http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/spatialdatalibrary/pdf_maps/project_boundaries/ionia_project_boundaries.pdf Internet site showing DNR land management in each county.

- In the region, the next closest state parks are Yankee Springs RA, west of Hastings in Barry County, approximately 30 miles southwest of Ionia SRA, and Sleepy Hollow SP, north of Lansing in Clinton County, approximately 36 miles east of Ionia SRA.

- The Ionia County Parks and Recreation Department runs Bertha Brock Park, a 208 acre park located less than one mile north of Ionia SRA. This park offers day-use facilities as well as outdoor natural resource based recreation that includes camping and over four miles of hiking/cross-country ski trails.



Green View Point Park is also administered by Ionia County. Located east of the Village of Lyons, this 5-acre park offers stunning views of the Grand River.

- There are local day-use recreation parks found in most communities in Ionia County.
- Sixteen Public Boating Access Sites (BAS) are located in Ionia County. Nine are operated by the DNR and seven by local units of government.

Specific information about these sites can be accessed through the DNR. The “Michigan Recreational Boating Information System” (MRBIS) “<http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS/>” is an excellent source of information about all Boating Access Sites and the water bodies they access.

- There are no federally owned or managed recreational areas in the area.
- **CURRENT LAND USE** – Ionia State Recreation Area is considered a multi-use park with recreational opportunities that include camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, equestrian trails, hiking and cross-country ski trails, mountain bike trails, fishing, hunting, trapping, and conduct of competitive field trials. The most intensive development of the 4,418 acre Park is around and near Sessions Lake, where developed recreation includes a boat launch, picnic facilities, beach, camping and equestrian staging and camping areas.



Sessions Lake, a man-made lake of approximately 140 acres, represents the purpose for establishing a state park here. This high quality water body provides recreation for swimming, boating and fishing, and is an attraction to waterfowl. Bald eagles that nest along the Grand River are known to frequent the lake.

The Grand River forms the northerly boundary of the park and is of significant impact. A large wooded floodplain is defined by the river and the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade, which roughly parallels the river and runs in an east/west direction, north of Riverside Drive.

The Michigan Mountain Bike Association (Mid-State Chapter) maintains approximately nine miles of trails in the area between the railroad grade and Riverside Drive.



The Ionia Field Trial Association has its headquarters and primary staging area off of Harwood Road, along the east boundary of the park. Approximately 14.5 acres at this location are under lease to the Association, as well as an additional 1.5 acre parking area along Riverside Drive.



Approximately 1,970 acres of the RA are designated “Field Trial Courses”. The primary use of this acreage is the conduct of field trials and the training of field trial dogs. Public access is not restricted on these courses.

The majority of the Recreation Area is characterized as rolling terrain with intermittent open fields (primarily in the designated Field Trial Courses) and wooded sections. This land is accessed by a variety of trails (no mountain bike use in this area), including equestrian, and is enjoyed by hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Outlying land use is characterized as mixed residential, farmland, and commercial. Residential development is expanding north of Tuttle Road (north of Course #1). East and north of the park are gravel operations. Further east of the park, commercial development is expanding with construction of a new Wal-Mart store within one mile of the park boundary. South of the park, the land is primarily used for agriculture.

Ionia County does not have zoning.

Natural Resources -

- **ECOREGIONAL CONTEXT** – This topic is most effectively discussed in the MNFI Report for the park (“Ionia State Recreation Area – Natural Features Inventory and Management Recommendations – January 2002”). From that report, Ionia SRA is found within the Lansing subsection. This “is characterized by gently sloping moraines that are broken by several outwash channels and numerous end moraine ridges...exposed bedrock is rare, and glacial deposits over bedrock average 350-400 feet thick.”
- **WATER RESOURCES** – Ionia SRA provides approximately five miles of frontage on the Grand River. Within the park, there are two primary streams that outlet into the Grand River. Sessions Creek is the water source for “Sessions Lake”, a 140 acre man-made lake. Tibbets Creek is notable as a “Designated Trout Stream”. Finally, there are a series of wildlife floodings that were created in 1988 with dikes and control structures. These are found in existing lowland areas and are popular for waterfowl, waterfowl hunters and beavers.

Recreational boating opportunities (no-wake) are available on Sessions Lake from a Boating Access Site (BAS) located along the west shore, near the picnic area. A carry down access point to the Grand River is seasonally open. This is accessed from the Riverside Picnic Area.

- **CLIMATE** – The average annual precipitation is 36 inches, with average annual snowfall of 66 inches. Winds are generally out of the southwest. During the primary use season of the park, May through September, the average temperatures range from 57.7 degrees f to 71.0 degrees f. High temperatures range from 68.8 to 82.0 and low temperatures range from 46.6 to 59.9.
- **GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY** – The surface geology of Michigan is made up of glacial deposits. As outlined earlier, Ionia SRA is located in the Lansing subsection, which is “characterized by gently sloping moraines that are broken by several outwash channels and numerous end

moraine ridges...exposed bedrock is rare, and glacial deposits over bedrock average 350-400 feet thick.”

The general description of Ionia SRA is that it is rolling terrain, interspersed with glacial ridges, stream valleys, and the Grand River along the north property line of the park.

The elevation change in the park is significant, ranging from 630 feet above sea level at the banks of the Grand River to 830 feet at the highest point in the park.

- SOILS – Soils in the park vary considerably. The higher elevations in the park are characterized by well to moderately well drained soils, while any depressions, flats, or gently sloping areas are characterized by poorly to very-poorly drained soils.
- FLORA – With European settlement, the Circa 1800 landcover was greatly impacted by agricultural practices. What was once Beech-Sugar Maple forests became farmland. A significant amount of this old farmland remains intact today, but instead of being farmed, it is maintained in an open condition for field trial purposes.

Wooded areas that do remain are predominately maple. There are scattered pockets of conifers, planted years ago, and these are vigorous enough to self-generate.

The Grand River floodplain has remained relatively intact, and is characterized as a mixed hardwood swamp. The wildlife floodings south of Riverside Drive still reflect the “Shrub Swamp/Emergent Marsh” land cover of circa 1800.

There were no rare plants identified by MNFI survey work in Ionia SRA. They (MNFI) do acknowledge that the following plants could occur:

- Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) – State threatened
- Large toothwort (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State threatened
- Showy orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*) – State threatened
- Green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State special concern

FAUNA – Mammals commonly found at Ionia SRA (from the 1978 Environmental Impact Statement) include white-tailed deer, fox squirrels, cottontail rabbit, woodchuck, muskrat, mink, and beaver. A variety of birds, include pheasant, ruffed grouse, woodcock, hawks, and owls. Added to this list are turkey, bald eagles, herons, and a variety of waterfowl, and upland non-game species.

Reptiles have not specifically been inventoried at the park.

Aquatic species vary with water body. The Grand River includes warm-water species of fish, including northern pike, black bass, walleye, carp, sucker and panfish. Tibbets Creek is a designated trout stream and supports a naturally reproducing population of brook trout. Sessions Creek is not a designated trout stream, but has occurrences of trout.

Sessions Lake is a warm water fishery, with walleye, bass and panfish.

MNFI identified the following occurrences of rare species at Ionia SRA:

- Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) – State special concern
- Henslow's sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) – State threatened
- Elktoe mussel (*Alasmodonta marginata*) - State special concern
- Purple wartyback (*Cyclonaias tuberculata*) - State special concern
- Round pigtoe mussel (*Pleurobema coccineum*) - State special concern
- Snuffbox mussel (*Epioblasma triquetra*) – Endangered

Additionally, MNFI does acknowledge that the following rare plant and animal species could occur in the park:

- Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) – State threatened
- Large toothwort (*Hybanthus concolor*) - State threatened
- Showy orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*) - State threatened
- Green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*) – State special concern
- Long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) - State threatened
- Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) – Endangered
- Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*) - State special concern
- Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) - State special concern
- Migrant loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*) – Endangered
- Least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*) - State threatened
- Woodland vole (*Microtus pinetorum*) - State special concern

Historic/Cultural Resources

- **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT** – Located on the Grand River, the historic pathway of both native Americans and European-American settlers, Ionia SRA is comprised of lands from the earliest settlement of Ionia County. Ionia was settled by Samuel Dexter in 1833, and Ionia SRA lands were settled for agricultural purposes by 1835. The evidence of historic/cultural resources reflects this prominent agricultural use of the land.



- CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT – Historic records show that Native American settlement took place on or near Ionia SRA land along the Grand River and Sessions Creek. The Pottawatomie and Ottawa tribes were active in the area. Chief Cobmoosa was second in command of the Flat River Band of the Ottawa tribe, who had established a settlement in Ionia (city) along the Grand River. On May 28, 1833, the first white settlers came to settle in Ionia, led by Samuel Dexter (Dexter Trail), who bartered with the tribe for their wigwams and crops. After receiving \$25 in gold coins, Chief Cobmoosa moved his group west into what is now Ionia SRA, to a location west and south of the Sessions Schoolhouse, on Sessions Creek.

Early holdings of land in Ionia SRA were secured by Alanzo Sessions, beginning in 1835. There, Mr. Sessions (Sessions Creek, Sessions Schoolhouse) established a successful farm operation and a prominent life in public service, both in local and state politics. Records make note that Chief Cobmoosa was a frequent guest of Alanzo Sessions. Other historic farmsteads dot the landscape that is Ionia SRA, and of unique distinction are remnants of an old mill operation on Sessions Creek. This is acknowledged to represent one of the earliest efforts of industry in Ionia County.

- ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES – No documented evidence of Archaeological sites of Native American occupation within the park exists, although there are plentiful anecdotal accounts. Documented sites do exist outside the park at Ionia, Lyons-Muir and other locations nearby along the Grand River.

Given the proximity of Ionia SRA to known sites, and to the Grand River, archaeological occurrences are highly likely in the park. **Any land change activities in the park that involve excavation of soil, such as construction of roads, installation of underground utilities, or installation of building foundations (to name a few) must undergo an archaeological review to determine their potential impact on the cultural/historic resources of the park.**

- BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES – Remnants exist of European-American occupation throughout the park. Intact historic structures include the manager's residence (Haynor House), the Sessions Schoolhouse and the Posse House. The Sessions Schoolhouse, built in 1847, is believed to be the oldest existing schoolhouse in the state. Scattered within the park are old foundations from early farmsteads, and an old mill operation on Sessions Creek. North of Riverside Drive is the Ionia County Infirmary Cemetery (1907-1949). The people buried there are identified on a bronze plaque mounted on a large boulder.



(Haynor House)



(Sessions Schoolhouse)



(Posse House)



(Memorial Plaque)

- HISTORIC LANDSCAPE – Remnants of the farming activities exist today with well defined fields cleared from the beech/maple forest, and scattered fruit orchards.

Education And Interpretation

- 'KIDS IN PARK' PROGRAM - This statewide program is available at all state parks in Michigan. It offers 4th grade teachers the park as an outdoor classroom in support of the Department's popular L.A.P.'s program. Saranac, Lakewood and Ionia school districts have participated in this program at Ionia SRA.
- INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMMING AND DISPLAYS – Ionia SRA is one of 40 parks in Michigan where the “State Park Explorer Program” is an active part of the educational experience. At Ionia SRA, the interpreter conducts outdoor classroom sessions, and has focused on general natural resource education as the key element of those learning experiences. The Department's “Learn to Fish” program is also run by the interpreter, and is a very popular activity for park visitors.

Historic interpretation of the Sessions Schoolhouse is accomplished through interpretive signage and through programming by the Explorer Ranger.

Interpretation of the Field Trial use of Ionia SRA is absent to date from these efforts.

- VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS – Ionia SRA is popular with the ‘Campground Host Program’ whereby volunteers, often retirees, stay at a campground and provide visitor services for the campers. They greet campers, provide information on campground rules and regulations, promote educational and interpretive opportunities in the park, and offer a social gathering (coffee hour) once a week.



The Ionia Horse Trails Association is very active within the park in maintenance of the equestrian trail system, which totals 15.8 miles of trail. They are a part of the “Adopt-a-Park Program”.

Similarly, members of the Michigan Mountain Bike Association (MMBA) provide needed maintenance of approximately nine miles of mountain bike trails located north of Riverside Drive.

The Ionia Field Trial Association is responsible for maintenance of the Field Trial Grounds for trialing purposes, and for maintenance of the leased land and facilities that they utilize for field trial operations. This work is divided among the various dog clubs that benefit from the use of these public lands.

Ionia SRA benefits from volunteer activities for park clean-up days or special projects from Boy Scout troops, interested individuals, and court workers (as a 'Community Service' requirement placed on local offenders by the court system).

Volunteer training exercises conducted by local fire and law enforcement officials have benefited the park in the past with placement of swim buoys at the beach and building demolition.

Recreational Resources

- **DEVELOPED OPPORTUNITIES** – Ionia SRA offers a diverse array of recreational opportunities with both day-use activities and camping. Following are the recreational features of this park:

- **Camping** – There are three campgrounds in the park. The first is a fully modern facility served by a flush-type toilet/shower building. Each of the 100 sites has an electrical pedestal, fire ring and picnic table, and access to water.

The second campground is a designated 'Horseman's Campground'. This 49 site rustic campground has vault-type toilets and water spigots.

An 'Organization' Campground provides needed space for groups, and is served with minimal facilities of water and vault-type toilets.

These campgrounds are served by a Sanitation Station located near the camping registration building.

- **Day-use Picnic Areas and Shelters** – There are several picnic areas available for public use and enjoyment in the park.
 - "Beachwood Picnic Area" is located near the Sessions Lake Boat Launch along the SW shore of the lake. It has a ball field,

picnic grills and tables, water supply, a covered shelter, vault toilet, and access to hiking trails.

- The “Point Picnic Area” is located on the east end of Sessions Lake, and offers picnic tables and grills, water supply, a fishing pier, vault toilet, and access to hiking trails.
 - The “Riverside Picnic Area” is located along Riverside Drive at the location of the old County Home. Amenities at this location include a covered shelter, play equipment, picnic grills and tables, water supply, vault toilet, and access to the mountain bike trails.
- Boating - A rustic boat launch (carry-down) providing limited access to the Grand River is accessed from the Riverside Picnic Area. Otherwise, access to the river is available at a site at the Ionia Fairgrounds upstream, or in the Village of Saranac downstream.

A Boating Access Site is located on Sessions Lake, providing a concrete ramp with a courtesy pier, and parking for 25 car/trailer units. NOTE...Sessions Lake is a “No-Wake Lake”.

- Fishing – Sessions Lake is managed by Fisheries Division as a warm water fishery that supports through a fish stocking program, walleye, bass, and bluegill. Fishing access is from the boat launch on the lake, the fishing pier at the Point Picnic Area, or by random access along the shore.

The Grand River offers fishing opportunities for walleye, pike, bass, sucker, and panfish, with access from the river or dispersed opportunities along the river bank.

- Trails – There are five defined trail systems in the park, serving different uses. Following are descriptions of these trails:
- The “Sessions Lake Trail” is a short (3.3 mile) loop hiking trail that meanders around Sessions Lake, making connections with the modern campground, the “Point Picnic Area”, the day-use beach, and the “Beachwood Picnic Area”.
 - The equestrian trails are accessed from both the equestrian campground and the equestrian staging area (used by day-use riders). This trail system is made up of multiple loops that span a great portion of the overall park. Totaling 15.8 miles in length, riders experience the wide range of resources in the park, as the trails meander through woodlots, along high ridges, cross

multiple water courses and access one of the identified “Scenic Zone” locations, the “Overlook”. From this high point, stunning views are revealed to the north and northwest.

Note...these trails are also open for hiking and cross-country skiing. No bicycle use is allowed.

- In the winter, nine miles of the equestrian trail to the west of Sessions Lake is designated as cross-country ski trail. Three loops are signed for varying skier capabilities, with a one mile “Beginner” loop, a 2.5 mile “Intermediate” loop and a 5.5 mile “Expert” loop.
- Bracketed by Riverside Drive to the south and the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade to the north, a series of three loop trails form the nine mile “Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Mountain Bike Trail”. In general, these loops increase in difficulty from east to west.

Access to this trail system is primarily from the Riverside Picnic Area and from a connector trail that accesses a mountain biker parking area just west of the beach. Additionally, several small parking pull-offs along Riverside Drive are used for access as well.

- Servicing the Field Trial Courses is a 12.5 mile designated route for use by the event judges, the spectator gallery, and the field trialers ‘Dog Wagon’. This is a single purpose trail.
- Field Trialing – With 45% of the park established as a ‘Field Trial Course’, this is a very popular use of the park land. From April to November, with a lull in the summer months, field trials and/or training takes place nearly every day during this use season.

- DISPERSED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Hunting and Trapping – During the fall and winter seasons, from September 14 to April 1, Ionia SRA is open for hunting. Small game hunting is primarily for rabbit and squirrel, and large game for deer. Bird hunting includes turkey, pheasant, and waterfowl. Some trapping activity takes place in the impounded marsh areas south of Riverside Drive, primarily for beaver and muskrat.

- Birding and Mushrooming – With its diversity of habitats, Ionia SRA is a popular site for these activities. The Fog Quarry Bird Club maintains over 100 bluebird houses in the park.
- AREAS OF CONFLICT – With diverse use for multiple interests comes the potential for conflict between users and/or between users and the natural resource or historic/cultural values of the park. Ionia SRA is no exception. Following are the identified conflict issues for this park:
 - Dissimilar operating rules - with 1,969 acres of the 4,418 acre park designated for field trial courses, this special activity impacts many park visitors who are appreciating the park for other reasons. Not only is there the physical impact of activity, but also vastly different operating rules that apply to field trials vs. other park users. For example, field trialers can ride their horses anywhere on the course (when engaged in a trial or training) when equestrian riders must stay on the designated equestrian trails. In all other areas of the park (except for hunting activity), dogs must be retained on a 6' max. leash...field trial dogs run free. While public use of the field trial grounds is assured, that assurance carries with it the caveat that other uses shall not interfere with the primary use of the grounds for field trialing.
 - User conflicts – with the impacts cited above come conflicts of use. These are seen primarily between field trialers and hunters (field trial activity disrupts a hunt), campers (issues with dogs/horses that wander off course), mountain bikers (who cross the field trial course to get to their trail system), and equestrians (who share some segments of trail and some stream crossings with the field trialers).

Other user conflicts occur outside of the field trial courses as well, with mountain bike activity on the equestrian and hiking trails, and indiscriminate snowmobile activity.
 - Posse House – this is an old school house (part of our Cultural Zone designation) located on the north side of Riverside Drive, immediately west of the Sessions Schoolhouse. It is owned by the State, with a deed requirement that the Ionia Sheriff's Posse can utilize it for their purposes. They use it for a shooting range, having built a berm behind the structure to shoot into. It is also used by the corrections officers from the nearby Ionia Prison System.

The Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Mountain Bike Trail runs behind this berm (within approximately 100'). In addition to this conflict of proximity to recreational uses, the noise of shooting activity can be disruptive to the otherwise natural setting of the area.

- Trespass Issues – This relates primarily to trespass onto state property by neighbors on horseback or ORV's who want free access from their property onto the park trails. Additionally, trespass can occur in the other direction, with field trial dogs 'escaping' the designated courses and crossing over onto private properties.

Park Use Statistics and Economic Impacts (based on 2003 data)

- PARK USE – Ionia SRA is within one hour's drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Lansing, and 16.4% of the population of Michigan. That proximity helps to account for why more than 327,650 people visited the park in 2003. Of these, 11.8% were campers and 88.2% were day-users. Total revenues (Motor Vehicle Permits and Camping Fees) generated by the park in 2003 exceeded \$285,600.

Characterization of park use is described as follows: (based on 2003 MDNR-Park Attendance Statistics)

- Summer Use Season – This is defined as the three month period of June through August, when schools are not in session. 62% of all camping and 48% of all day-use takes place during these months.
- Fall Use Season – At Ionia SRA, the fall season is defined by the months of September through November. September and October are the highest use months of this season for camping, while day-use activity is consistent for all three months. In this season, 24% of all camping activity and 29% of all day-use activity takes place.
- Winter Use Season – December through February mark a significant decline in park activity, accounting for 0% of all camping use. Day-use activity is fairly active with nearly 8% of all day-use during this time period.
- Spring Use Season – March through May shows increasing park use in both categories. Camping use is at 14% and day-use is at 15%. In this season, use continually increases as the weather warms up in May.

From "MI CRS Statistics 2003" report by Spherix, the state contractor that administers the Campground Reservation System (CRS), Ionia SRA was the fourth ranking park (out of five) in the Mid-Michigan Region of Michigan with 4,914 campground reservations in 2003. Fort Custer RA

was first of the five parks in the region with 7,156 and Newaygo SP was lowest with 2,222.

From the same source, the following statistics (2003 data) are attributable to Ionia SRA:

- Nearly 15% of campground use is from locations within one hour of Ionia SRA. The majority of these come from Grand Rapids, Lansing and Lowell.
 - Ionia SRA ranked #53 of all state parks for gross revenue from camping. Of the \$173,708 generated by camping in 2003, \$141,255 came from the Modern Campground, \$25,090 from the Horse Campground, \$3,109 from the Organization Camp, and \$4,254 from the field trialers.
 - The average amount paid per reservation at Ionia was \$35.45, well below the state average of \$54.88. The high in the state system was \$100.80 at Grand Haven SP on Lake Michigan, and the low was \$20.77 at Fisherman's Island SP.
 - The average number of people per reservation was 2.71, less than the state average of 3.03.
 - The average length of stay was 2.21 days, which is below the state average of 2.46 days. Parks in the system that exceed this number are the Lake Michigan beach parks and very few others.
- ECONOMIC IMPACTS - Michigan State University (Dr. Dan Stynes) developed an economic analysis model known as "MGM2". This model is an update of the MGM model developed by Dr. Ken Hornback for the National Park System in 1995. The purpose of the updated MGM2 model is to estimate the impact of park visitor spending on the local economy. These economic impacts are reflected in terms of sales, income, employment, and value added.

This analysis tool, like others, relies on three primary factors in the common equation:

Economic Impact of Tourism Spending = Number of Tourists (x)
Average Spending per Visitor (x) Multiplier (to estimate extended effects of direct spending).

For our purposes of conducting a very basic review of impacts, we have utilized the ["MGM2-Short Form"](#) version of the program, which simplifies the extent of analysis required for input, and utilizes more generalized

multipliers for spending outputs. For the non-economist, this provides an excellent tool for this desired baseline assessment of the economic impacts of our parks.

Economic impacts of Ionia SRA to the local community are significant. Ionia County is a low density county, with 107.3 persons per square mile vs. a statewide density of 175 persons per square mile (2000 data).

Much of the land in the county is farm land, and the area around Ionia SRA is characterized as rural. This characterization is tempered by the fact that development is approaching the park from the direction of Ionia, with a major (Wal-Mart) commercial property being constructed within a mile of the east park boundary. Other commercial development and residential development pressures will likely follow.

Following are the relative economic impacts (based on 2003 data) of Ionia SRA to the economy of Ionia County:

- DIRECT ECONOMIC EFFECTS TO THE COMMUNITY
 - Direct spending attributable to Ionia SRA visitors totaled \$4,067,000, of which \$2,553,000 came from Day-Use, and \$1,514,000 from Camping.
 - Jobs totaled 128, with 80 related to Day-Use activity and 48 to Camping. (Note...jobs are not full-time equivalent. They include part-time and seasonal positions.)
 - Personal Income total is \$1,383,000, with \$868,000 associated with Day-Use of the park and \$515,000 associated with Camping.
 - Value added (total income plus business taxes) totaled \$2,088,000. Day-Use accounted for \$1,311,000 and Camping accounted for \$777,000.
- TOTAL ECONOMIC EFFECTS TO THE COMMUNITY (NOTE...this reflects 'Direct Effects' plus the 'Secondary Effects' of visitor spending on the local economy. Secondary Effects (sometimes called 'Multiplier Effects') capture economic activity that results from the re-circulation of money spent by the park visitors in the community.
 - Total spending = \$5,377,000 (24% over direct spending)
 - Jobs = 150 (15% over direct job impacts)
 - Personal Income = \$1,820,000 (24% over direct spending)
 - Value added = \$2,896,000 (28% over direct value added)

NOTE....for purposes of updating economic values, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is often used to adjust values over time. Through the following link, [<http://www.bls.gov/home.htm>] a CPI Inflation Calculator is located in the category of "Inflation and Consumer Spending".

Stakeholder Input

- **DNR PROGRAMS** – Ionia SRA has a long history of cooperative management with other Department programs, the most significant of which is with Wildlife Division and Fisheries Division.

Fisheries Division conducts active management of Sessions Lake for a warm-water fishery that includes; walleye, bass, channel catfish, perch and bluegill. Of significance for southern Michigan is that it has designated Tibbets Creek as a "Designated Trout Stream". Additionally, the Grand River is managed for Walleye, with stocking locations at Saranac, David Highway, M-66, and Portland. It is also managed for anadromous species of salmon and trout, with stocking locations in Grand Haven and Grand Rapids for Chinook Salmon, Lansing and Lyons for Coho Salmon, and Lansing and Prairie Creek (Ionia) for Steelhead Trout.

Wildlife Division has been a partner with PRD in the management of the field trial activities at Ionia SRA. In 1979, Wildlife Division and Parks Division co-signed the "Ionia Recreation Area Field Trial Management Plan", which provided the structure by which field trialing would be conducted on state lands at Ionia SRA, and it also provided specific guidance for the management of the grounds.

Another DNR program with a stake in Ionia SRA is 'Education and Outreach (EO). Ionia is one of many parks where an "Explorer Guide" is located. This person conducts educational programming for park visitors, tailored to the unique resources of the park. In addition to this hands-on educational approach, EO also contributes to educational opportunities with the development and placement of information kiosks and bulletin boards.

Finally, Law Division provides enforcement of state law and Natural Resource regulations on the park property.

- **LOCAL AGENCY PROGRAMS** – Ionia SRA is accessed by the county road system, under administration of the Ionia County Road Commission.

Another local agency with an interest in the park is the Ionia County Parks & Recreation Department. Immediately north of Ionia SRA is their premier park, Bertha Brock Park. They are currently exploring the potential for

creation of a new rail-trail that would utilize the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad grade that runs through the park.

- PRIVATE SECTOR – All adjoining property owners are categorically a stakeholder. Additionally, local business interests in both Saranac and Ionia are as well. Park users don't spend their money just at the park...a significant amount of commerce takes place at local stores, restaurants and lodging locations.
- SPORTING CLUBS – MUCC has a long-standing interest at Ionia SRA with its involvement in the field trialing clubs that utilize the park. Additionally, the following clubs or associations are very active in the park:
 - Ionia Field Trialers Association (IFTA) – this group holds the lease on the Field Trialers Headquarters, and is responsible for coordinating overall maintenance of the field trial grounds.
 - Ionia Horse Trails Association (IHTA) – this group was formalized in 1998, but equestrian riding has been an integral component of park use since 1975. Beginning in that year, most of the equestrian trails were developed. The IHTA is responsible for equestrian trail development and maintenance.
 - Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA) – The 'Mid-State Chapter' of MMBA is responsible for the development and maintenance of the "Chief Cob-Moo-Sa Trail" in the park.
- SPECIAL INTERESTS – The Ionia County Historical Society has shown interest in the park with the past restoration efforts of the Haynor House (manager's current residence) and the interpretation of the Sessions Schoolhouse. Additionally, the following groups have an interest in the use of Ionia SRA:
 - Beekman Center (Lansing) – therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Kent County Special Riding Program - therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Eaton County Special Riding Program - therapeutic riding sessions in the park.
 - Berlin-Orange Fire Department – first responders for emergencies in the park.

- Ionia County Sheriff Department Dive Team – set the swim buoys annually.
- Sheriff's Posse – use the Posse House property for shooting range activities.
- PUBLIC – Many of the 327,000 +/- park visitors who come to Ionia SRA each year are repeat customers. This is true system wide. From the Public Policy Associates 1997 “Michigan State Parks Study”, 80% to 89% of visitors to State Parks in Southern Michigan are “Likely” to return to the park within twelve months. From the same study, the likelihood of a park visitor ‘recommending’ a particular park to others was also high in Southern Michigan, with a range of 85% to 88% saying that they would recommend visiting the park.

APPENDIX

REPORTS

- Stewardship Management Plan ([“Phase II Natural Resource Management Plan”](#))
- [Michigan Natural Features Inventory](#)
- Phase 1 Archaeological Study (access through Stewardship)
- [Economic Impact Analysis](#)
- Field Trial Grounds Management Plan (when complete)
- [“Evaluating Riparian Management Zones on State Lands”](#)
- [“Water Quality Management Practices on Forest Land”](#)
- [Lease Agreement with Ionia Field Trial Association](#)

MEETING MINUTES

- [9/30/2003 Start-up Meeting](#)
- [10/17/2003 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [1/6/2004 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [2/6/2004 Planning Team Meeting](#)
- [3/3/2004 Stakeholder Meeting – Ionia Field Trial Association](#)
- [3/4/2004 Stakeholder Meeting – Ionia Trail Riders Association](#)
- [8/12/2004 Public Information Meeting](#)
- [5/12/2005 Planning Team Final Review](#)

RESOLUTIONS

- [12/6/2005 Statewide Council](#)
- [12/7/2005 Citizen’s Committee for Michigan State Parks](#)